



# I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

by Maya Angelou

## Teacher's Guide

Written By Mary Ellen Snodgrass



**LIVING  
LITERATURE  
SERIES**

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## Synopsis

### Introduction

Marguerite "Maya" Johnson sits in church on Easter and dreams of having curly hair and blue eyes. She flees the sanctuary, laughing at her liberation from church.

### Chapter 1

Arriving by train in Stamps, Arkansas, from Long Beach, California, three-year-old Maya and her four-year-old brother Bailey Junior escape their parents' divorce and live with their paternal grandmother, Mrs. Annie Henderson, owner of the Wm. Johnson General Merchandise Store.

### Chapter 2

Maya sympathizes with her crippled Uncle Willie. In her relatives' care, she falls in love with English and American classic authors. She and Bailey memorize James Weldon Johnson's "The Creation."

### Chapter 3

Momma demands work in the store, which is Maya's favorite place to be. On a tip from the former sheriff, they hide Uncle Willie from the Klan, which retaliates for a black who "messed with" a white woman. Uncle Willie moans all night in his uncomfortable cell.

### Chapter 4

Maya recalls Bailey's pranks and his immense appeal. She runs errands to the white section of town.

### Chapter 5

When local white trash girls mimic Momma, Maya rakes the front yard in a heart design pierced with

an arrow. Momma acknowledges the love gift and sings a spiritual.

### Chapter 6

When the Reverend Howard Thomas visits, Maya and Bailey mimic him. They laugh uncontrollably at Sister Monroe, whose outbursts stymie Reverend Taylor and cause Rev. Thomas to drop his false teeth.

### Chapter 7

Momma Henderson's first husband, Mr. Johnson, the father of Uncle Willie and Maya's father, abandoned his family about 1900. His successor, Mr. Henderson, was virtually unknown to the children. Mr. Murphy, Momma's last mate, was a scoundrel who left abruptly. Momma is respected and beloved. A judge honors her by calling her Mrs. Henderson, a rare act of courtesy from a white male to a black female.

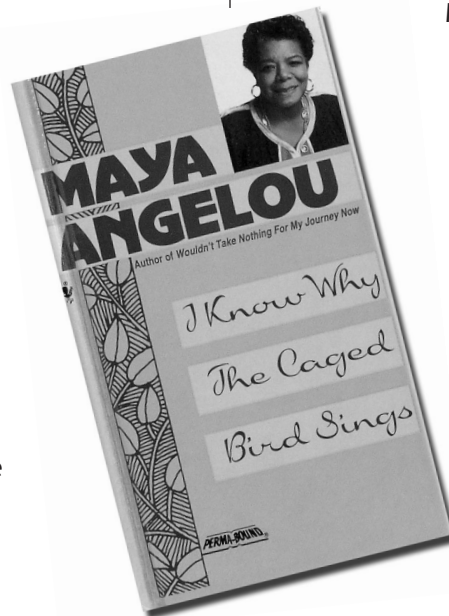
### Chapter 8

Maya and Bailey ponder lower class whites, to whom Mrs. Henderson serves lunch at the sawmill and cotton gin. During

the Depression the store survives via a trading system that allows credit in goods for powdered milk and eggs and canned fish. The children fantasize about their parents. On Christmas, Daddy Bailey mails them his photograph. Vivian sends a tea set and a blue-eyed, blond doll. Maya wonders if her actions caused the banishment to Alabama.

### Chapter 9

Daddy Bailey, a doorman at Santa Monica's Breakers Hotel, arrives from the West when Maya is seven and impresses them with his proper English. Before he takes them to St. Louis to live with their mother, Momma sews clothes for Maya and stresses that "God is love." The children are overwhelmed by Vivian "Bibbi" Baxter Johnson, who is beautiful,



witty, vibrant, and street-smart. Bailey falls instantly in love with her, but Maya feels left out. A few days after the journey, Daddy Bailey leaves for California.

### Chapter 10

The children adapt quickly to city life, which contrasts the slow, backward Southern lifestyle of Stamps. Grandmother Baxter wields political clout as a precinct leader. Bibbi delights the children by dancing, strutting, and admiring and showing off her “darling babies.” At Louie’s bar, she teaches them to dance. Her brothers—Tutti, Tom, and Ira—brutalize Pat Patterson, who curses Bibbi. Vivian lives with Mr. Freeman, an unlikely mate for a fun-loving woman.

### Chapter 11

While Vivian works as a nurse by day and at night in gambling parlors, Mr. Freeman works days as foreman in the Southern Pacific yards. One morning, he masturbates against Maya. She fantasizes that he is her real father. He warns her never to tell on pain of death for Bailey.

### Chapter 12

In late spring, Mr. Freeman rapes Maya. Bibbi finds her lying in bed. The next morning, he is gone. Bailey discovers the soiled panties that explain the change in Maya and Mr. Freeman’s sudden departure.

### Chapter 13

At the hospital, Maya divulges the rape to Bailey, who weeps for his sister. She testifies against Mr. Freeman, who is sentenced to a year and a day in prison. He returns immediately to the streets, where Vivian’s brothers kill him. Guilt-ridden, Maya lapses into silence. She and Bailey are sent by train to Arkansas and the healing love of Momma Henderson.

### Chapter 14

Stamps seems more barren than before. Customers at the store accept Maya as she is.

### Chapter 15

A year later, at Momma’s request, Mrs. Flowers encourages Maya to memorize poetry. Literature restores her self-esteem.

### Chapter 16

At age 10, Maya works in the kitchen of Mrs. Viola

Cullinan, a pseudo-aristocratic white Virginian who calls Maya “Margaret.” Angrily, Maya hurls dishes on the floor and is fired.

### Chapter 17

Maya and her brother enjoy movies at the Rialto Theater. One outing keeps Bailey after dark. Momma and Maya search for him along the road. Maya learns that Bailey’s passion for movies stems from his love for Bibbi, who resembles actress Kay Francis. Bailey sees her movies several times to be close to the image of “Mother dear.”

### Chapter 18

A revival causes Maya to ponder the similarity between secular and religious philosophy, both intended as spiritual escape for blacks.

### Chapter 19

Friends and patrons flock to Annie’s store to hear a radio broadcast of the Joe Louis-Carnera fight. The black audience exult when Louis advances to world champion.

### Chapter 20

Maya makes friends with Louise Kendricks and finds a first love, Tommy Valdon, who sends her a valentine. Maya hurts his feelings by tearing it up. Tommy writes a second time to express his dismay. The teacher reads his sentiments aloud to the class.

### Chapter 21

While Maya stands guard, Bailey and Joyce withdraw to a tent for sexual experimentation. Maya is disgusted. Months later, at the first sign of pregnancy, Joyce runs away with a railroad porter to live in Dallas, Texas. Bailey refuses to comment on her departure.

### Chapter 22

In November, George Taylor comes to dinner. He describes visits from Florida, his dead wife. Maya remains silent about Mr. Freeman and withdraws into the safety and goodness of Momma Henderson.

### Chapter 23

When Maya graduates from the eighth grade at Lafayette County Training School, she receives a handmade yellow dress, a Mickey Mouse watch from Momma, and a book from Bailey. Her dreams

of a perfect graduation day are marred by Mr. Edward Donleavy, a white politician who patronizes and devalues the class of 1940. Henry Reed saves the day by leading the Negro national anthem, "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing." Maya thanks black poets, preachers, and musicians for championing Negroes.

## Chapter 24

Maya develops cavities. Momma takes her to Dr. Lincoln, a white dentist who owes Momma a favor for lending him money during the Depression. At the back entrance, he refuses black patients. Momma and Maya take the bus to Dr. Baker in Texarkana. Momma tells Willie that she forced Dr. Lincoln to pay ten dollars interest and to sign a receipt marked "paid in full."

## Chapter 25

To rescue the children from racism, Momma prepares to return them to Bibbi in Los Angeles. Momma and Maya travel by train. After a month, Bailey joins them.

## Chapter 26

Vivian settles them in a Los Angeles apartment. Daddy Bailey visits. Six months later, Vivian moves to an Oakland apartment, where she runs a poker game. When World War II begins, she moves to San Francisco with a second husband, Clidell, a successful businessman.

## Chapter 27

Maya observes the racism against Japanese Americans and exults in freedom from Southern prejudice. An incident involving an amputee proves that white people continue to despise blacks.

## Chapter 28

Maya transfers to George Washington High School and blossoms under Miss Kirwin, who treats students equally and stimulates discussion of current events. Maya receives an unexpected scholarship to the California Labor School to study drama and dance.

## Chapter 29

Clidell teaches Maya to play card games and introduces her to professional gamblers. When he walks with Maya, people assume that he is her real father.

## Chapter 30

Maya goes to live with Daddy Bailey. His girl friend, Dolores Stockland, considers her an intrusion. Bailey enjoys having two women vying for his attention. He takes Maya to a primitive Mexican community where he is known as a flashy good-timer. Because he gets too drunk to drive, Maya steers down the mountain to Calexico, where she is involved in a minor car accident.

## Chapter 31

Dolores calls Vivian a whore. Maya slaps her. Dolores stabs Maya in the side. Daddy Bailey takes her to friends for first aid. She awakens in a strange bed and considers suicide.

## Chapter 32

Maya escapes to town, where she reads at the public library. At an abandoned car, she joins a community of teen runaways. Lee Arthur, a friend of the gang, allows the girls to bathe at his house while his mother is at work. Maya petitions Vivian for plane fare. On her return to San Francisco, she cooks special foods for Maya.

## Chapter 33

Bailey and Maya grow apart. He lives with Betty, a white prostitute. Vivian arranges for him to get a job on the Southern Pacific Railroad.

## Chapter 34

Maya lies about her experience to get a job on a street car. She gradually loses interest in school. Vivian allows her to skip school if there are no tests that day.

## Chapter 35

At 16, Maya fears that she is a lesbian. Vivian assures her that enlargement of the vulva is normal. Maya looks for a boyfriend to acknowledge her femininity. After a single impersonal encounter, she gets pregnant.

## Chapter 36

Maya writes to Bailey, who is at sea with the merchant marine, and confesses her dilemma. Three weeks from delivery, Maya graduates from high school. She leaves a note on Daddy Clidell's bed confessing she has disgraced the family. Vivian convinces Maya that nurturing her newborn son will come naturally.

## Timeline

- 1791** Toussaint L'Ouverture leads freedom fighters in Haiti.
- 1797** The Masons, a fraternal order, is organized.
- 1800** Gabriel Prosser leads a slave uprising in Richmond, Virginia.
- 1831** Nat Turner is executed for organizing a slave revolt.
- 1866** Fisk University opens its doors to students in Nashville, Tennessee.
- 1867** Horatio Alger publishes the first of his rags-to-riches novels.
- 1868** The fraternal order of Elks is established.
- 1876** The Eastern Star is established.
- 1882** The Knights of Columbus are organized.
- 1888** Jack the Ripper terrorizes London.
- 1919** Mexican dissident Zapata dies.
- 1923** The Mexican bandit Pancho Villa dies.
- 1928** *Mickey Mouse* cartoons debut.
- 1929** Oct. 29: The stock market crashes, signaling the beginning of the Depression.
- 1930** *The Shadow* becomes a popular radio mystery.
- 1933** *Alley Oop* appears as a syndicated cartoon. March: The Civilian Conservation Corps is established to give work to the unemployed.
- 1935** June 25: Joe Louis defeats Primo Carnera for the world heavyweight championship.
- 1936** Jesse Owens wins Olympic medals in track and field. Jan. 31: Detroit radio originates the *Green Hornet*. Feb. 17: Ray Moore creates the *Phantom*.
- 1938** May 26: The House Un-American Activities Committee is formed.
- 1939** November: *Captain Marvel* comics are first produced.
- 1941** Dec. 7: Japanese bombers attack Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Dec. 8: The U. S. declares war on Japan.
- 1942-44** Japanese-Americans are interned in eleven camps throughout the U.S.
- 1945** February: American Marines wage a significant battle against the Japanese. August 14: Japan surrenders to the U. S. August 15: Americans celebrate V-J Day. Sept. 9: Emissaries sign a formal surrender on the *USS Missouri* in Tokyo Bay.

## Author Sketch



Maya Angelou, pseudonym of Marguerite Johnson, demonstrates an eclectic spirit. She was influenced by the opposing forces of worldly, citified divorced parents and the traditional deep-South mothering of her paternal grandmother, Annie Henderson, in Stamps, Arkansas. Born the second of two children in St. Louis on April 4, 1928, to Vivian "Bibbi" Baxter, a nurse and gambler, and Bailey Henderson, Senior, a flamboyant doorman and chef, Angelou spent her early childhood in the stifling, prejudiced rural environment of southern Arkansas. Along with older brother Bailey Junior, she returned to her mother's home in St. Louis in 1936.

Life in the city enlivened Angelou with its ease, entertainments, and charm. Vivian indulged her daughter with a glamor and motherly grace that contrasted the Bible Belt firmness of Momma Henderson. The Baxter family, including a part-German grandmother, invalid grandfather, and three fierce uncles, earned respect in political circles. After Mr. Freeman, Vivian's lover, raped and threatened Maya, she retreated into silence. To cope with her daughter's trauma, Vivian returned her to Stamps.

Through the aristocratic stimulus of Mrs. Bertha Flowers, Maya overcame guilt and fear and at age twelve graduated with honors from Lafayette County Training School. Reestablished with Vivian in Los Angeles, she moved with the family to Oakland and then to San Francisco's Fillmore district. A stabilizing influence of her teen years was a satisfying relationship with her stepfather, Daddy Clidell Jackson, a real estate investor.

While attending the California Labor School, Maya began working as a street car conductor at age 18 and graduated from Mission High a few weeks before the birth of her only child, Clyde Bailey "Guy" Johnson. She worked in night clubs, a record store, and a brothel, cooked in a bistro, and danced in an exotic stage show. Her marriage to Greek-American Tosh Angelos lasted until the mid-1950s, when she joined a government-sponsored tour of Africa and Europe with a road show of *Porgy and Bess*. Guy remained with Vivian.

Returning to take charge of her son, Angelou settled in Sausalito and began writing. In New York, she joined the Harlem Writers Guild, sang at the Apollo Theatre, and acted minor roles off Broadway. In 1961, she married Vusumzi Make, a South African politician, and made their home in Johannesburg. After the marriage failed, she worked as a journalist for the *Arab Observer*, an English newspaper.

Because Guy was injured in a car wreck, Angelou moved to Accra to attend him and worked as a college administrator at the School of Music and Drama, for which she wrote original productions. Homesickness returned her to California. Under the influence of Bayard Rustin, a civil rights activist, and of Martin Luther King, Jr., she joined the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

In 1973, Angelou married Paul Du Feu, a white building contractor, and moved to Sonoma, California. She composed music and published novels, autobiography, poetry, and plays. She took a bit part as grandmother of Kunta Kinte in *Roots* and in an adaptation of Sophocles' *Ajax*. In January 1993, she presented an original poem at the inauguration of President Bill Clinton.

## Critic's Corner

Maya Angelou sums up a resilient attitude toward work and success, "You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated." Her flexibility and enthusiasm have earned a host of accolades, including the *Ladies' Home Journal* 1976 Woman of the Year in Communications, a Candace Award, nominations for a Pulitzer Prize and a Tony, and honorary degrees from Smith College, Mills College, and Lawrence University. She has appeared on television talk shows, in a PBS series set in Stamps, and a special with Richard Pryor.

Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, a Book-of-the-Month Club selection, remains a favorite on both feminist and multicultural lists. A moving, introspective black autobiography, it stands out as a readable, enjoyable, and valid representation of black American womanhood. The movie version, starring Constance Good, aired on April 28, 1979. The intensity of Good's performance as Maya blended well with the contributions of Esther Rolle

as Grandmother Henderson, Diahann Carroll as Vivian, and Roger Mosely as Daddy Bailey. Critics responded to Angelou's recreation of the tender years of girlhood and the brutality of Mr. Freeman, who changed Maya's outlook so drastically that she forced herself to become mute.

## Other works by Maya Angelou

*Adjoa Amisah* (1967)  
*All Day Long* (1974)  
*All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* (1986)  
*And Still I Rise* (1978)  
*Black, Blues, Black* (1968)  
*Black Pearls: The Poetry of Maya Angelou* (1998)  
*A Brave and Startling Truth* (1995)  
*The Clawing Within* (1966)  
*The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou* (1994)  
*Even the Stars Look Lonesome* (1997)  
*Georgia, Georgia* (1972)  
*Gettin' Up Stayed on My Mind (The Way It Is)* (1966)  
*Gather Together in My Name* (1974)  
*The Heart of a Woman* (1981)  
*I Shall Not Be Moved* (1990)  
*Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'Fore I Diiie* (1971)  
*King: Drum Major for Love* (1990)  
*Kofi and His Magic* (1996)  
*The Least of These* (1966)  
*Life Doesn't Frighten Me* (1998)  
*Mrs. Flowers* (1986)  
*Now Sheba Sings the Song* (1987)  
*Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well* (1975)  
*On a Southern Journey* (1983)  
*On the Pulse of Morning; The Inaugural Poem* (1993)  
*Phenomenal Woman; Four Poems Celebrating Women* (1993)  
*Poems: Maya Angelou* (1986)  
*Shaker, Why Don't You Sing?* (1983)  
*Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas* (1975)  
*Sister, Sister* (1982)  
*A Song Flung Up to Heaven* (2002)  
*Theatrical Vignette* (1983)  
*Trying to Make It Home* (1989)  
*On the Pulse of the Morning* (1993)  
*Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now* (1994)

## Related Reading

William Armstrong, *Souder*  
E. R. Braithwaite, *To Sir, With Love*  
Claude Brown, *Manchild in the Promised Land*  
Ralph Ellison, *Flying Home and Other Stories*

Kay Gibbons, *Ellen Foster*  
Alex Haley, *Queen*  
Elizabeth Kata, *A Patch of Blue*  
Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*  
Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*  
Gary Paulsen, *Nightjohn*  
Susan Straight, *I Been in Sorrow's Kitchen and Licked Out All the Pots*  
Theodore Taylor, *The Cay* and *Timothy of the Cay*  
Richard Wright, *Black Boy*

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"Maya Angelou," <http://hs1.hst.msu.edu/~cal/celeb/angelou.html>  
"Maya Angelou," <http://iisd1.iisd.ca/50comm/panel/pan04.htm>  
"Maya Angelou," <http://www.coe.uca.edu/ArkansasAuthorsIndex/angelou.html>  
"Maya Angelou," <http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/~mmaynard/Maya/maya5.html>

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"More Links to Maya Angelou," <http://ucaswww.mcm.uc.edu/worldfest.html>  
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## General Objectives

1. To define autobiography
2. To describe the physical, mental, and emotional effects of low self-esteem
3. To characterize life for Southern blacks during the 1930s and 1940s
4. To acknowledge the importance of achievement, autonomy, and self-determination
5. To contrast characters in their responses to despair, isolation, desire, change, poverty, loss, and deprivation
6. To consider the significance of work, love, prestige, and trust
7. To discuss the value of acceptance to growing children
8. To account for defiance and testing of limits in teenagers
9. To define realism and objectivity
10. To isolate the zest and variety of black culture
11. To characterize the rhythm of narrative and commentary
12. To account for de-emphasis of male roles
13. To describe vivid sense impressions

## Specific Objectives

1. To outline Maya's academic growth
2. To recount changes in Maya's family structure
3. To discuss the sources of Annie's income
4. To explain why Annie wants to rescue her grandchildren from Southern racism and violence
5. To account for Maya's sexual fears
6. To describe Vivian and Bailey's faults as parents

7. To describe the influence of Uncle Willie, Mrs. Flowers, and Mrs. Cullinan on Maya's life
8. To analyze why Mr. Freeman molests and threatens Maya
9. To analyze Annie's position as spiritual leader, entrepreneur, and disciplinarian
10. To contrast Daddy Bailey and Daddy Clidell
11. To enumerate turning points, such as Bailey's discovery of Anne Francis and Maya's departure from the junkyard gang
12. To list ways in which Bailey and Maya cope with their parents' divorce
13. To evaluate the title
14. To account for Maya's love of reading and drama
15. To assess the author's depiction of the rural South
16. To contrast varying examples of Angelou's enhancement of the Maya character
17. To validate Angelou's autobiography as feminist literature
18. To explain how Maya's relationship with Bailey alters over time

## Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Maya Angelou's style, present the following terms and applications to her autobiography:

**Climax:** the height of an action, a crisis or turning point from which all behaviors or attitudes are permanently altered and nothing can ever be what it once was. The turning point for Maya is the double trauma of rape by a pedophile and the post-trial murder of the villain. Maya is tender-hearted in childhood and feels responsible for her testimony, which brought about Mr. Freeman's conviction and subsequent murder by Bibbi's brothers. The resolution of the child's inner torment is the discovery of poetry and its uplifting humanism. The connection has served Angelou well throughout her life.

**Conflict:** the external physical struggle or internal emotional tension between opposing characters or forces in a dramatic action, as demonstrated by the shifting forces that undermine Maya's security. Approaching womanhood upsets her self-image and leaves her with questions concerning normal sexuality. Maya's sexual encounter with a volunteer male becomes extreme proof of femininity. The

incident results in the conception of a son, whom she conceals from her family until shortly before birth and fears to hold and care for. Her mother's self-assured way with infants encourages Maya to trust herself and allow normal instincts to lead the way.

**Contrast:** the obvious difference or dissonance that appears when disparate objects, persons, statements, themes, or situations are compared. In childhood, Maya enjoyed the love and support of a firm, religiously motivated mother figure, Annie Henderson. When Maya moves to St. Louis, she discovers strong women of another type—tough-talking politico Grandmother Baxter and the sparkling ease and grace of nurse/gambler Bibbi Bailey, the mother she had never known. The contrast accounts for variations in outlook and self-discipline as Maya reaches maturity, runs away from her father, then returns to her mother to complete the perplexing task of growing up.

## The Importance of Setting

Setting is a major strength of Angelou's autobiography. In early childhood, Maya and her brother Bailey Junior live under tight constraints of Annie Henderson's fundamentalism. The children go to school and church, work in the family store, and attend to chores that keep them under the watchful eye of their grandmother and Uncle Willie. Bailey's first encounter with freedom takes him to town to the Saturday movie to see Anne Francis on the screen. His late return provokes such consternation in his grandmother that he understands the terrors of black families when their children brave a hostile racist environment.

The sudden shift to St. Louis produces other dangers amid a wealth of pleasures. Maya enjoys the citified pleasures that were unknown in Stamps, Arkansas. She gawks at her silky-smooth mother dancing and gesturing in Louie's bar and thrills to read science fiction at the public library. The terror of rape, public testimony in court, and subsequent murder of her attacker temporarily shuts down her speech. The neurotic response forces Vivian to return Maya by train to Stamps and Grandmother Henderson for the tender nurturing that the children knew from infancy.

## I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings Maya Angelou

On return to Vivian, Maya begins to test the environs of California. Her enthusiasm for school and her observations of wartime racism against Japanese Americans derive from the multicultural neighborhoods of Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Francisco, where Maya's perceptions about race expand beyond black and white. In Bailey's care, she ventures into Mexico and learns how her charming daddy romances Hispanic women at a rural cantina.

The roundabout conclusion to Maya's growing up takes her from trailer park to stranger's home and flight to a junkyard, where she finds other young people in search of a suitable life free of parental discipline. At the end of her flight from parents, she

knows that a place with family is right for her. Content in Vivian's acceptance and encouragement, Maya comes rapidly into womanhood by way of giving birth to Guy Johnson.

### Cross-Curricular Sources

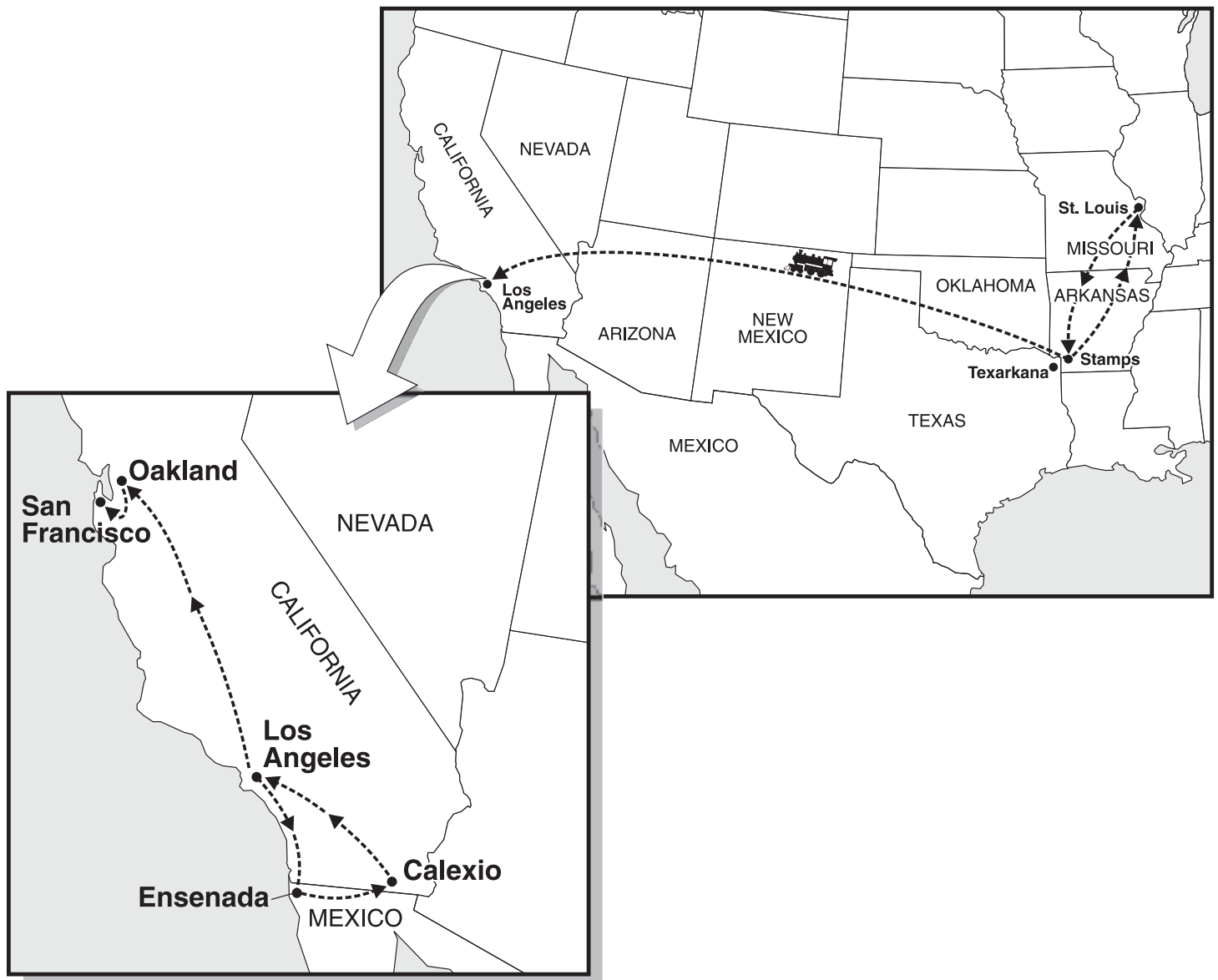
For more information about black history, race prejudice, poverty, liturgical music, rape, grief, and depression, consult these sources:

*African-American Music—A Chronology 1619-1995*, Ikoro Communications

*Black History Month Resource Book*, Gale Research

*Celebrating Women's History*, Gale Research

*Civil Rights*, Center for the Humanities





Equality, Interact

*Gospel Sound: Good News and Bad Times*, Limelight Editions

*Music of Black America: A History*, W. W. Norton & Co.

Poverty, Opposing Viewpoints

*Protest and Praise: Sacred Music of Black Religion*, Fortress Press

*Proud to Be Me*, Zenger

*Race and Prejudice in America Today*, Knowledge Unlimited

*Rape and Sexual Assault*, Garland

Also, consult these websites:

Black History Month

<http://www.netnoir.com/spotlight/bhm/jbhm.html>

Children and Grief

<http://www.psych.med.umich.edu/web/aacap/factsFam/grief.htm>

Crisis, Grief, and Healing

<http://www.webhealing.com>

Depression Homepage

<http://www.depression.com>

DIScovering Multicultural America

<http://galenet.gale.com:8888>

## Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* should include these aspects:

### Themes

- poverty
- family
- humor
- abandonment
- learning
- brutality
- yearning
- child abuse
- running away
- scholarship

### Motifs

- coping with Southern bigotry
- learning to function in a hostile environment
- confronting job discrimination
- acquiring a stepparent
- relieving stress through creativity

## Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have a particular meaning in the autobiography. Explain each. Chapter and page numbers note the context from which the item is taken.

1. I thought Uncle Willie sinfully vain, especially when I had to iron seven stiff starched shirts and not leave a cat's face anywhere, (Chap. 8, p. 50)  
(*Maya describes the mass of wrinkles resulting from improper or insufficient ironing. Once the iron forces the dampened starched surface into ridges, the fabric must be redampened or rewashed to ready the garment for another ironing.*)
2. When we enrolled in Toussaint L'Ouverture Grammar School, we were struck by the ignorance of our schoolmates and the rudeness of our teachers. (Chap. 10, p. 63)  
(*In the typical style of black communities, authorities choose the name of a black champion for the grammar school. Pierre François Dominique, Haitian soldier and liberator (1743-1803), was born a slave and became commanding general of the military in Santo Domingo. After an insurrection placed power in the hands of natives, he wrote a constitution and was appointed president for life of the republic of Haiti. Napoleon's troops captured him. L'Ouverture died in a French prison.*)
3. Then even the old Christian ladies who taught their children and tried themselves to practice turning the other cheek would buy soft drinks, and if the Brown Bomber's victory was a particularly bloody one they would order peanut patties and Baby Ruths also. (Chap. 19, p. 134)  
(*The Brown Bomber is the nickname of Joe Louis, a black prizefighter and heavyweight champion. He was born in Lafayette, Alabama, and began his professional career in 1934. He retired in 1949. Louis attempted a comeback against Ezzard Charles in 1950 and against Rocky Marciano in 1951, but lost both matches. The autobiography, My Life Story, narrates his rise to fame.*)
4. The Japanese shops which sold products to Nisei customers were taken over by enterprising Negro businessmen, and in less than a year became permanent homes away from home for the newly arrived Southern Blacks. (Chap. 27, p. 209)  
(*Angelou refers to native American citizens born of immigrant*

parents from Japan. The internment of people of Japanese ancestry after the bombing of Pearl Harbor resulted in unfair deprivation and disenfranchisement, an economic windfall to entrepreneurial blacks. A detailed account of the era can be found in Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston's memoir, *Farewell to Manzanar*.)

5. The needs of a society determine its ethics, and in the Black American ghettos the hero is that man who is offered only the crumbs from his country's table but by ingenuity and courage is able to take for himself a Lucullan feast. (Chap. 29, p. 224)

*(Maya's hyperbole refers to the luxurious and sybaritic entertainments hosted by Lucius Lucinius Lucullus (110-57 B. C.), a general and consul and contemporary of Julius Caesar during the final days of the Roman republic. The adjective Lucullan suggests gaudy excess for the purpose of displaying wealth in order to arouse envy.)*

6. I would say to the doctor, "The moving finger writes and having writ, moves on . . ." and my soul would escape gracefully. (Chap. 31, p. 248)

*(In an imaginary dramatized death scene, Maya quotes a segment of Edward Fitzgerald's translation of The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám. Khayyám was a poet and mathematician in 12th-century Persia. The rest of the stanza reads, Nor all your Piety nor Wit Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line, Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it. Maya fantasizes quoting the line to the doctor at the emergency room in stoic acceptance of her death from a stab wound.)*

7. After hunting down unbroken bottles and selling them with a white girl from Missouri, a Mexican girl from Los Angeles and a Black girl from Oklahoma, I was never again to sense myself so solidly outside the pale of the human race. The lack of criticism evidenced by our ad hoc community influenced me, and set a tone of tolerance for my life. (Chap. 32, p. 254)

*(Maya's Latin phrase means "[added] to this" and refers to a special case, separate from the ordinary and without general application. Maya's new-found friends at the junkyard live apart from the normal lifestyle of the surrounding community. After a month in their company, Maya has a new understanding of tolerance.)*

8. Mother and Bailey were entangled in the Oedipal skein. (Chap. 33, p. 257)

*(Maya compares Bailey's adoration for Vivian with the fatal marriage of Oedipus, king of ancient Thebes, and his mother Jocasta. Sigmund Freud used the term "Oedipal complex" to describe the unconscious attachment between mothers and sons. The female equivalent, the "Electra complex," signifies a parallel attraction between fathers and daughters. Although the relationships are normal, any unresolved feelings that carry over into adulthood can lead to neurotic disorders.)*

9. The secretary and I were like Hamlet and Laertes in the final scene, where, because of harm done by one ancestor to another, we were bound to duel to the death. (Chap. 34, p. 267)

*(Maya compares her three-week siege against the Market Street Railway Company to the tragic conclusion of William Shakespeare's Hamlet, in which Hamlet and Laertes engage in inevitable combat which neither is fated to survive. Maya and the secretary represent the concluding forces of a racial con-tretemps that "must end somewhere.")*

10. Old buildings, whose gray rococo façades housed my memories of the Forty-Niners, and Diamond Lil, Robert Service, Sutter and Jack London, were then imposing structures viciously joined to keep me out. (Chap. 34, p. 268)

*(Maya recalls the heyday of San Francisco when the gold rush of 1849 at Sutter's Mill lured prospectors to California in search of easy fortunes. Tawdry campsites spawned honky-tonks where entertainers such as Diamond Lil earned instant fame. Stories written by poet Robert Service and novelist Jack London preserve some of the ambience of the mid-1800's.)*

## Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

### Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. Why are Bailey Junior and Maya so entranced with Vivian?

*(To country children reared by a fundamentalist in Stamps, Arkansas, Vivian represents life in the city. In comparison to Momma Henderson, who thought it a sin to wear lipstick, Vivian's worldly, pleasure-loving style is like a "hurricane in its perfect power" or the "climbing, falling colors of a rainbow." Their mother is beautiful, blessed with gleaming teeth and a*

*“fresh-butter color [that] looked see-through clean.” She dazzles them with smiles, flamboyance, and prettiness, elements of style that she shares with Bailey.*

*Vivian lures the children into big-city ways, cutting Maya’s hair into a bob and straightening it, teaching both children to dance, and providing them with exotic food, clothing, privileges, and comforts that Momma Henderson was unable to afford. In contrast to the countrified, Bible-quoting black grandmother who raised them, Vivian is educated, well-born, and lighthearted, like a “pretty kite that floated above [Maya’s] head.” She epitomizes the freedoms and enticements of St. Louis.)*

2. Describe the tent revival in Stamps, Arkansas. *(Revival is a unique form of Southern entertainment and enlightenment. Late in the evening after long hours picking cotton, laborers assemble under the cloth tent “set on the flatlands in the middle of a field near the railroad tracks.” Seated in folding chairs on the bare earth beneath a large wooden cross, the audience is wreathed in the light of electric bulbs strung around them on two-by-fours. Teenagers use the opportunity for convivial flirtation. Older folk chat and visit.*

*Members of several churches listen as Mrs. Duncan calls them to worship with repetitions of “I know I’m a witness for my Lord.” The minister, a “tall, thin man who had been kneeling behind the altar,” stands up and stretches his arms toward the gathering, exhorting all to embrace charity. His emotional cadence draws them into the spirit of the occasion; they respond with shouts, prayers, songs, swoons, and chants. The service culminates in the unexpected—an altar call to join whatever church the wayward sinner chooses.*

*The service comforts members of an oppressed, devalued Southern minority. After the collection and a final hymn, the congregation exits the tent, convinced that “it was better to be meek and lowly, spat upon and abused for this little time than to spend eternity frying in the fires of hell.” On their way home, they pass the honky-tonk run by Miss Grace, where rhythms and tunes sound remarkably like the hymns of the tent revival.)*

3. How does Maya describe herself in the opening vignette? *(Maya Angelou applies an intense realism to the introduction of the Maya character. She remembers herself on Easter morning, dressed in a “plain ugly cut-down from a white woman’s once-was-purple throwaway.” Her skinny legs are “greased with Blue Seal Vaseline and powdered with the Arkansas red clay.”*

*Like many women born in the Shirley Temple era, she fantasizes movie-star features in place of small, squinty eyes, oversized frame, “nappy black hair, broad feet, and a space between her teeth that would hold a number-two pencil.” She concludes: “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. It is an unnecessary insult.”)*

4. Why does Maya empathize with the cotton pickers? *(The totality of insult, degradation, and misery in the lives of Southern agricultural negroes is symbolized by the plight of the pickers. Departing in early morning from Momma Henderson’s store with their purchases of sardines, cheese, soda crackers, and peanut patties, the workers return at the end of a day’s toil “dirt-disappointed.” Good spirits and positive attitudes are never strong enough to hold back the tide of poverty that enslaves the cotton pickers.*

*Maya recalls her inability to associate the “stereotyped picture of gay song-singing cotton pickers” with the weary, discouraged laborers who crowd into her grandmother’s store. Crushed by the hopelessness of manual labor, “their shoulders drooped even as they laughed, and when they put their hands on their hips in a show of jauntiness, the palms slipped the thighs as if the pants were waxed.” Their tattered rags, swollen feet, and linty hair “gave them the appearance of people who had turned gray in the past few hours.” To Maya, they epitomize slavery in the twentieth century.)*

5. How does Maya occupy her time during her month at the junkyard? *(After sleeping in relative comfort in an abandoned car, Maya awakens to a “collage of Negro, Mexican and white faces outside the windows.” She shares experiences with fellow runaways and receives their highest reward—acceptance, a gift she is hesitant to award herself. One rule governs their harmonious commune: “no two people of opposite sex slept together.” To fend off social workers and juvenile officers, the denizens avoid theft and welcome odd jobs, such as collecting bottles, working in restaurants, mowing lawns, sweeping pool halls, and running errands.*

*To augment their meager wages, the teenagers compete in dance competitions for cash prizes. Matters of personal hygiene are performed at Lee Arthur’s house when his mother is away at her job. More important than external matters, however, is the realignment of Maya’s thinking while she lives with the gang. She forms a more flexible attitude toward the “brotherhood of man,” learning firsthand the importance of acceptance in an “ad hoc community.” )*

**Questions 6-8 (Interpretive Level)**

6. How does Edward Donleavy’s speech distort Maya’s picture of her race’s accomplishments? *(After weeks of anticipation and preparation, Maya is eager for the rewards she has earned for academic excellence—the*

*“meticulous maps, drawn in three colors of ink, learning and spelling decasyllabic words, memorizing the whole of The Rape of Lucrece.” But a few moments of a white politician’s patronizing, stereotyping speech reduce her idealism to rubble. In her disillusionment, “we were maids and farmers, handymen and washerwomen, and anything higher that we aspired to was farcical and presumptuous.”*

*Her wretchedness at the Negro’s lack of control over destiny leads Maya to wish for death, not only for herself, but for all people, “one on top of the other.” As Donleavy departs for more important functions, he leaves behind an ugliness that is palpable, an “uninvited guest who wouldn’t leave.” Maya’s mind pictures the blot in “colors I hated: ecru, puce, lavender, beige and black.”*

7. How does Henry Reed restore Maya’s hopeful mood?

*(Maya’s internal monologue spars with Henry’s valedictory. “Hadn’t he heard the whitefolks? We couldn’t be, so the question was a waste of time.” After she silently rebuts each point of his address, she realizes that Henry, too, has been moved by Donleavy’s speech. He deserts his conservative, straight-A demeanor and addresses fellow graduates with a challenge. Initiating the anthem which the class omitted earlier, he prods them to “Lift ev’ry voice and sing.” The effect sweeps the audience, including parents, teachers, and small kindergarteners, dressed like buttercups, daisies, and bunny rabbits.*

*For the first time, Maya identifies with the familiar poetry of James Weldon Johnson, understanding the stony road, chastening rod, and unborn hope. The cathartic moment unites not only the graduating class of 1940, but the whole black community of Stamps, Arkansas, and the entire Negro race. Maya concludes, “we survive in exact relationship to the dedication of our poets.” The statement suggests that source of her admiration for words and their power over readers.)*

8. How does Maya’s life deviate from the norm in her last year of high school?

*(Maya, never the average child, sets her feet on a definite path of resistance to destructive stereotypes and racial prejudice. She vies for a “whites only” job, besieging the transportation company’s outer office for three weeks to obtain a position that pays half as much as other available forms of employment. As she encounters difficult work schedules and alienation from school interests, she dimly realizes that she is being tested. Her response is the mark of her individuality: “to be left alone on the tightrope of youthful unknowing is to experience the excruciating beauty of full freedom and the threat of eternal indecision.”*

*From these experiences arise Maya’s worthiest traits, her ability to take a stand against conformity, injustice, and mediocrity and to accept the discomforts and fear that accompany every suc-*

*cess. Like the child that rebels against the humiliation of Grandmother Henderson when a dirty slattern bares her bottom in a handstand, the girl who can empathize with Uncle Willie’s rebellion against physical deformity, and the teenager who learns to accept maternal responsibility for a son conceived as a result of experimentation with her newfound womanhood, Maya prepares herself for a life of rejecting the bottom level of existence in exchange for a rich, satisfying self-actualization.)*

### Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. How do the experiences of Marguerite Johnson produce a Maya Angelou?  
*(From early childhood, both Marguerite and Bailey Junior learn to depend on the wisdom that comes from self-reliance. Cut off from the advantages that accompany beauty, wealth, privilege, and social class, Marguerite expects to earn her way by intelligence, daring, and courage. She forms the rudiments of Maya Angelou at an early age by insisting on self-expression and by retreating into the wisdom of Charles Dickens, William Shakespeare, and other classic authors when the realities of her life deprive her of intellectual stimulus.*

*That Maya Angelou became an author, performer, educator, and civil rights leader is hardly surprising. Her goals are the predictable outlets of an irrepressible spirit confined to too small a space in a narrow-minded Southern community. Like a jack-in-the-box, she bounds away from confinement toward the freedom of being and doing all that her genetic nature intended.)*

10. Why does this book belong among the classic works read by young adults?

*(The autobiography of Marguerite Johnson tells a forthright, poignant, and entertaining story of youth coming to know itself and rejoicing in limitless possibilities. Students can identify with the speaker’s uncertainties, gaucheries, temptations, and victories. The concreteness of Marguerite’s first driving experience, first valentine, first best friend, and first job lends credibility to the work, drawing the reader on to subsequent discoveries.*

*Despite the tinge of conceit and willfulness that Angelou demonstrates from time to time, she is a strong, believable character. Her intellectual curiosity, her wrestlings with social evils build character, the one facet that rings true in each episode. The reassuring conclusion is inevitable— despite a hierarchy of racial, political, and social don’ts, the Marguerites of this world strive to be and to do.)*

### Questions 11-13 (Creative Level)

11. Read a representative sample of poetry and prose from the Harlem Renaissance. Choose for memorization a series of lines that characterize Maya Angelou’s struggle to accept and surpass her limitations.

12. Prepare questions to ask Maya Angelou in a one-on-one interview. Include facts her biography don't reveal, particularly what happened to Bailey Junior, her parents, and Guy.
13. How do the oppressed—the handicapped Uncle Willie, overworked pickers, homeless teenagers, abused children, intimidated women, poor cantina workers, and dispossessed Japanese-Americans—find ways to sing in the confinement of their cages? Compose a poem or song to account for their successes.

## Across the Curriculum

### Art, Architecture, and Music

1. Create a bulletin board contrasting these settings: Bailey's trailer, the junkyard, Annie's store, the revival, Mrs. Cullinan's kitchen, Maya's street car, Bailey's boarding house room, Dr. Baker's office, the back door of Dr. Lincoln's office, the fish fry, the pond where the unidentified body is found, Maya's eighth grade graduation from Lafayette County Training School, the Fillmore district of San Francisco, the canteen near Calxico, Mr. Freeman's bedroom, Grandmother Baxter's house, the courtroom, Miss Kirwin's class, the St. Louis public library, onion bins in Annie's country store, and the train that takes Maya and Momma to Los Angeles.
2. Using computer graphics or other artistic methods, design a schedule of dental services and prices, an advertisement for a street car conductor, a sign for the St. Louis library or Louie's bar, an itinerary for Bailey's ship, a train schedule for the route from Stamps to Los Angeles, a revival brochure, an invitation to Maya's high school graduation, a schematic drawing of Vivian's Alaskan night club, a map of Stamps or Calxico, a family tree of the Baxters and Hendersons, or a bulletin for the C. M. E. Easter Service.
3. Draw settings for a movie version of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Show Maya's graduation from eighth grade, Annie's sewing machine, Uncle Willie's special shelf, Bailey's tent, Miss Flowers' home, Vivian's gambling parlor, the

railroad crossing in Stamps, and the Hudson that Maya drives to Calxico. Emphasize props, lighting, costumes, make-up, music, and special effects.

### Cinema

1. View the films: *Lilies of the Field*, *Native Son*, *A Patch of Blue*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Mississippi Burning*, *Glory*, *Conrack*, *Queen*, *Sarafina*, *Hurry Sundown*, *To Sir With Love*, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, *Raisin in the Sun*, and *J.T.* Discuss with a small group the difficulties blacks and whites encounter when they breach racial barriers and learn to know each other.
2. Using a storyboard, determine how a stage director would describe setting, atmosphere, mood, tone, theme, and characters in the autobiography. Select a scene, such as the confrontation at Dr. Lincoln's office, and name current actors who would play the parts. Add dialogue to flesh out the scene.

### Drama and Speech

1. Improvise several conversations that are only implied, such as Joyce's arrangements to marry the porter, Annie's fight with Dr. Lincoln, Vivian's talk with Maya about returning home from the junkyard, Maya's comments to the secretary about the street car job, Miss Kirwin's encouragement of Maya's education in current events, Vivian's lessons on female anatomy and baby care, Mr. Freeman's court testimony, Bailey's arguments with Vivian about Betty, and Mrs. Viola Cullinan's interview with her new maid.
2. Compose a short speech in which you describe how constant changes in living arrangements affects Maya and Bailey. Explain how close living quarters, family squabbles, nosy neighbors, religious fanaticism, firm discipline, insecurity, sexual abuse, racial prejudice, longing, and divorce affect family relationships.
3. Suggest reasons why Maya Angelou joined the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Listen to recordings of speeches from black and white leaders such as President Lyndon Johnson, Justice Earl Warren, Barbara Jordan, and Dr. Martin Luther King. Note how they improved racial relations in the U. S. through non-violent protests.

4. Role-play the arrival of Maya and Bailey in St. Louis. Indicate their surprise at the ease and excitement of urban life in Louie's bar, Grandmother Baxter's precinct, the St. Louis schools and public library, and Bibbi's gambling halls.

### Economics

1. Lead a debate about the value of hiring minority workers on public transit. Why would the city of San Francisco profit from employing Maya and other black conductors? How would Hispanic, Native American, Korean, and Japanese employees benefit the system?
2. Using incidents from the book, determine how the Depression impacted Stamps, Arkansas. Explain how Annie's enterprise helped her prosper while others depended on welfare and free food.

### Education

1. Make a time line of the writers who influenced Maya's self-education. Mention William Shakespeare, Mark Twain, Rudyard Kipling, William Makepeace Thackeray, Edgar Allan Poe, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Langston Hughes, W. E. B. Du Bois, and James Weldon Johnson. Suggest works by each that are appropriate for young readers, for instance, Johnson's "The Creation."
2. Record strongly emotional modern poems that Maya might have memorized for Mrs. Flowers, such as Sylvia Plath's "Daddy" and Robert Lowell's "Skunk Hour." Summarize the qualities of each that would bolster the spirits of a depressed rape victim.

### History and Social Studies

1. Discuss Maya's relationships with strong women, particularly Mrs. Cullinan, the secretary of the Market Street Railway Company, Mrs. Flowers, Miss Kirwin, Bibbi, Annie Henderson, Dolores Stockland, and Grandmother Baxter. Isolate Maya's strengths as a parent, writer, artist, and teacher.
2. Study the Civil Rights movement from pre-Civil War times to the present. Emphasize the dominance of blacks in major sports, business

and property ownership, and improved education and work opportunities. Name the strongest black leaders of past and present times, such as Colin Powell, Clara Hale, Ralph Abernathy, Fannie Lou Hamer, Jesse Jackson, Marian Edelman, Frederick Douglass, Barbara Jordan, Julian Bond, Shirley Chisholm, Dr. Martin Luther King, and Faye Wattleton.

3. What does Maya learn from the treatment of Japanese-Americans during World War II? Why is she content in San Francisco's Fillmore District? Discuss with a group the long-range effects of segregation. Why is it important for people of different races to shop, work, go to school, live, worship, and play together?
4. Analyze the multi-generational lifestyle of Maya's family. Discuss with a group the effects of having multiple authority figures and the differences in their control of her behavior. Explain what Maya learns from Mr. Freeman, Bailey Senior, and Daddy Clidell.
5. Graph current census figures concerning the racial makeup of the United States. Highlight a map with charts, sidebars, and data indicating what parts of the nation are the most racially diverse. Note the percentage of non-white peoples in Arkansas, Texas, Missouri, and California.

### Language Arts

1. Compile a glossary for the novel to cover important terms. Define each and explain how it applies to Maya Angelou's autobiography.
2. List phrases from Angelou's writing that illustrate her knowledge of allusion, alliteration, simile, metaphor, caesura, rhyme, rhythm, personification, euphony, cacophony, parallelism, aphorism, and other rhetorical devices. Create original models of each.
3. Compose a short segment in which you become a peripheral character in the autobiography. Consider taking the role of a passenger on a San Francisco street car, a teacher at the Lafayette County Training School, a customer in Annie's store, an usher at the Rialto theater, a server at the Mexican cantina, a

librarian in St. Louis, or an Oakland landlord. Pantomime scenes involving Maya and Bailey.

4. Summarize the advice in *Marian Wright Edelman: Defender of Children's Rights*, which advocates hard work, ambition, a positive attitude, perseverance, responsibility, realistic goals, truth, and respect of other members of the human race.
5. Apply three Greek terms to the autobiography: *philos* or belonging to or acceptance by a group or family, *eros* or passion, and *agape* or unconditional love and acceptance. Discuss how failure to achieve any of these three states produces tension and disappointment in human relationships, as demonstrated by Maya's acceptance by the junkyard gang, Dolores' jealousy, Annie's generosity and discipline, Mr. Freeman's child molesting, Uncle Willie's punishments, and Vivian's inability to cure her mute daughter.
6. Read aloud other authors' descriptions of ethnic culture, such as Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*, Yoko Kawashima Watkins' *So Far from the Bamboo Grove*, Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*, Scott Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife*, Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, James Houston and Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar*, Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*, or Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*.
7. Compose an informal essay on the value of free libraries, magazines, newspapers, and books to a well-rounded, educated person. Select multicultural writers and works which have influenced your life. Name some works that deserve to be studied and/or memorized.
8. Read aloud Maya Angelou's *Now Sheba Sings the Song*. Compare her view of ideal black women with characters in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. What strengths does the poet emphasize in black women?

9. Lead a discussion of realism in family literature. Explain why Angelou blends serious topics such as divorce, separation, theft, rape, murder, humiliation, prejudice, segregation, the Klan, and prostitution with humorous scenes, i. e. Maya wetting her lavender church dress, Bailey stealing pickles, and worshippers in religious ecstasy at the revival meeting.

## Psychology

1. Explain to a small group the survival techniques that give black mothers like Annie Henderson the strength to face divorce, abandonment, hard times, loss, family disunity, rudeness, threats, manual labor, and disappointment. Discuss why other female characters, such as Dolores, Betty, the girls in the junkyard gang, Mrs. Cullinan, Glory, and racist passengers on the street car fail to earn the reader's admiration.
2. Make an oral report on ethnic pride. Discuss how current race relations and equalization of opportunities contrast the prejudice of the 1930s. Mention the dentist who refuses to treat blacks, the politician who demeans black graduates from the Lafayette County Training School, and a judge who is discourteous to black women.
3. Characterize in a theme Maya's various experiences with racial violence, prejudice, hypocrisy, ridicule, cruelty, carnality, vulgarity, and low expectations for nonwhite people. Discuss how humor enhances her resilience and strength of character.

## Science and Health

1. Discuss ways that parents can reassure children that evolving sexuality is normal. Use Vivian's straight-forward approach as a model. Comment on her reference to a dictionary for a definition of anatomical terms.

### Student Involvement Activities

1. Describe aloud the change that takes place in Maya after she runs away from Daddy Bailey's trailer. How does her relationship with Vivian improve? Why does a month of living with a youth gang enhance Maya's maturity? At what point does she choose to return to her family?
2. Create a list of images from the novel that appeal to the five senses, such as "I'd pictured myself, dressed in a neat blue serge suit, my money changer swinging jauntily at my waist, and a cheery smile for the passengers which would make their own work day brighter."
3. Compose a character sketch of a male authority figure in Maya's life, such as Uncle Willie or the principal of Lafayette school. Contrast the prestige and political clout of these men with the strengths of Annie Henderson, Vivian, and Grandmother Baxter.
4. Explain in a short speech the effect of disillusionment, alienation, separation, yearning, sexual abuse, prejudice, loss, uncertainty, poverty, religious fanaticism, hard work, and low self-esteem on Maya's family.
5. Explain in a theme contrasting moods in Maya's early years, for example, flight from church service, working at the store, and pride at the singing of "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing."
6. Compose a first person account of life in the South during Maya's childhood. Explain what she learns from the episode with Glory and Mrs. Cullinan, Uncle Willie's night in the potato and onion bin, and Annie's prosperity during the Depression.
7. Write a theme in which you explain the role of a minor character, such as Miss Kirwin or Henry Reed.
8. Draw a character web representing the interconnectedness of Maya's family. Include minor figures, particularly Tutti, Tom, Ira, Grandfather Baxter, Alberta, Clidell Jackson,

Billy, Mr. Murphy, Joyce, Betty, and Maya's son. Offer some reasons why Angelou is vague about Daddy Bailey's second wife and Bailey's fleeting relationships.

9. Explain why Maya Angelou chose to live and work in Africa. Outline this crucial period of her life, stressing her journalistic role and her job as a college administrator. Note the influence of this era on her outlook, motherhood, experience, self-concept, and appreciation of African styles and themes. Draw on outside sources for more information.
10. Draw a book jacket stressing a key scene from the novel, especially the fish fry, the receipt of a Mickey Mouse watch, listening to the Louis-Carnero fight on the radio, living in an abandoned car, and traveling by train from California to Stamps. Compose advertising which will encourage appreciative readers.

### Alternate Assessment

1. List examples of friendships and good fortune that help Maya grow up.
2. Summarize the aspects of St. Louis that Maya and Bailey learn to love.
3. Cite examples of poor choices that cause Maya suffering and grief.
4. Account for Maya's self-imposed loss of speech.
5. List and explain elements of the 1930s and 1940s that impinge on Maya's life.



## Vocabulary

Underline the word in each line that is a synonym for the boldfaced word.

1. **homunculus**: disciplinarian, gnome, claque, sibling, tumor
2. **record**: chronicle, rancor, throes, aphorism, upshot
3. **destructive**: tandem, arabesque, emotive, random, subversive
4. **bored**: Oedipal, en garde, blasé, ad hoc, bruted
5. **affliction**: finesse, leniency, impassivity, inflection, tribulation
6. **indolent**: lurid, exemplary, dawdling, contrapuntal, insolent
7. **unavoidably**: inevitably, diametrically, excruciatingly, unreservedly, imperviously
8. **wizened**: berated, desiccated, cajoled, conversed, modulated
9. **ape**: bedizen, eke, subpoena, banter, pantomime
10. **alteration**: extinction, denizen, impermanence, metamorphosis, dais
11. **efficient**: ecumenical, opulent, genteel, expeditious, onerous
12. **effulgence**: ecru, puce, aura, ennui, limbo
13. **satanic**: palpable, diabolic, impenetrable, retributive, acerbic
14. **abounding**: rife, aloof, herculean, tripartite, lofted
15. **deferential**: venereal, immaculate, servile, cater-cornered, immaculate
16. **spirit**: banshee, vulva, appellation, pandemonium, juncture
17. **locale**: aversion, venue, eventuality, gaffe, gravity
18. **nickname**: sobriquet, bombast, pince-nez, stability, virulence
19. **patterned**: paranoia, intensity, vagina, innate, moiré
20. **proportional**: appalling, commensurate, morose, indeterminate, rarefied

## Comprehension Test A

### Part I: Quotation Identification (20 points)

Match each of the following quotations with the speaker. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- |                  |                       |                |                 |
|------------------|-----------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| A. Bailey Junior | D. Dolores Stockland  | G. Marguerite  | J. Mrs. Flowers |
| B. Big Bailey    | E. Elder Thomas       | H. Miss Kirwin | K. Vivian       |
| C. Dr. Lincoln   | F. Grandmother Baxter | I. Mr. Freeman | L. Uncle Willie |

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. You see, I had planned to invite you for cookies and lemonade so we could have this little chat.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I made arrangements, a long time ago, to have a boy and a girl.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I am sorry to bring this disgrace on the family, but I am pregnant.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I have an old m-m-mother and my brother's t-two children to l-look after.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Good day, ladies and gentlemen.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. And if you tell, I'm gonna kill Bailey.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. I never want to hear this situation nor that evil man's name mentioned in my house again.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Now, my policy is I don't treat colored people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. You gave your daughter your jacket.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Boy, anybody tell you erer that you er look like me?

### Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark each statement either T for true or F if any part is false.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Maya receives a Mickey Mouse watch for graduation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Vivian warns Maya that the streetcar company does not hire colored girls.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Vivian lies before the judge in order to save Maya from testifying against Mr. Freeman.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Momma whips Bailey Junior and Maya for staying out too late to listen to the Joe Louis-Carnera fight on the radio.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Daddy Bailey does not realize that Maya is wounded until he feels the blood soaking his clothes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. The Mexican officer threatens to arrest Maya for drunken driving because she smells like tequila.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Maya does not tell Clidell about her son until after he is born.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Vivian makes plenty of money as a prostitute and blackjack dealer in Oakland.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Maya and Bailey Junior are punished for laughing at worshippers in church.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Maya is humiliated when a white politician belittles black people during a commencement speech.

## Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

### Part III: Completion (30 points)

Fill in the following blanks with words or phrases which will complete each.

1. Mrs. Cullinan insists upon calling Marguerite \_\_\_\_\_.
2. To help Maya overcome excessive melodrama, a teacher forces her to do six months of \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Bailey's graduation gift to his sister is a volume of poems by \_\_\_\_\_.
4. After white trash girls humiliate Momma, Maya rewards her by drawing a series of nested \_\_\_\_\_ and an arrow.
5. Because of a childhood disease, \_\_\_\_\_ was shaped like a giant black Z.
6. Arriving home from a movie, \_\_\_\_\_ insists that Vivian looks like Kay Francis.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ shoots a business partner twice with a .32.
8. Daddy is proud of Maya's ability to speak \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Bailey is forced to carry a sheet containing a dead \_\_\_\_\_ into the jail.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ hides from the Klan in the potato and onion bin.
11. \_\_\_\_\_ gives Marguerite her nickname "Maya."
12. At a Navy hospital in California, \_\_\_\_\_ works as a cook.
13. After \_\_\_\_\_ dies, the Baxter family loses its political influence in St. Louis.
14. \_\_\_\_\_ accompanies Maya on her train trip to California.
15. Henry Reed leads the graduating class of 1940 in singing the \_\_\_\_\_.

### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Describe the methods of three people who help Marguerite gain self-confidence.
2. Explain how Bailey changes before he leaves home.
3. Account for Maya's feelings of banishment in Stamps.
4. Enumerate examples of Annie Henderson's firm discipline.

## Comprehension Test B

### Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Select a response to complete each of the following statements. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Marguerite stops speaking after
- A. Bailey learns that she has been raped.
  - B. Mr. Freeman is found kicked to death.
  - C. the judge ridicules her.
  - D. Grandmother Baxter refuses to hear any more about Mr. Freeman.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. On graduation day Marguerite finds
- A. a yellow, crochet-trimmed dress on her bed.
  - B. a volume of Poe's poetry in the mail.
  - C. a Mickey Mouse watch on her plate.
  - D. several embroidered handkerchiefs in Uncle Willie's hand.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Daddy Bailey and his big car make quite an impression
- A. in Stamps, Alabama.
  - B. on Vivian Baxter's three brothers.
  - C. in front of Dolores Stockland's cantina.
  - D. when he drives Maya to the emergency room.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Maya flees from the strangers' trailer and
- A. takes the train to St. Louis.
  - B. begs her father for airfare.
  - C. sleeps in an abandoned car.
  - D. drives her father's car to Calxico.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Marguerite is outraged to see white trash children
- A. stealing sour pickles from the store.
  - B. imitating Momma.
  - C. playing ball near the community fish fry.
  - D. riding the street car in San Francisco.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Marguerite fantasizes that Momma
- A. hides Uncle Willie from the Klan.
  - B. finds a ghost lurking in the kitchen.
  - C. rescues her from pregnancy.
  - D. drives Dentist Lincoln out of town.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Dolores and Maya get into an argument after
- A. Daddy Bailey lends Maya his coat.
  - B. the woman in the cantina smiles at Bay-Lee.
  - C. Mrs. Cullinan tries to change Marguerite's name to Mary.
  - D. Vivian complains about the loud record player.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Vivian awakens Maya during the night
- A. to warn her about Mr. Freeman.
  - B. to explain Clidell's place in the household.
  - C. to dress her for the train ride to Stamps.
  - D. for a party.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Marguerite admires the grace and gentility of
- A. Mrs. Flowers.
  - B. Elder Thomas.
  - C. James Weldon Johnson.
  - D. Pat Patterson.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Momma helps other people during the depression by
- A. making low-interest loans to sawmill workers.
  - B. trading for powdered eggs and powdered milk.
  - C. cutting down old clothes.
  - D. sending Marguerite to work in white women's kitchens.

### Part II: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Compare Maya's home in Stamps with Vivian's house in San Francisco.
2. Describe the relationship between Maya and her brother.
3. Account for dangers to the lives of Maya and Bailey.
4. Summarize the parts of Maya's life spent in various American locales.
5. Give evidence that Maya is capable of fending for herself.

## Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

### Part III: Character Identification (30 points)

Identify the following characters. Place the proper names in the blanks provided at left.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. is revered as Mother Dear
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. becomes a conductress
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. speaks with a throaty German accent
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. joins the merchant marines
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. is nicknamed Ju
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. pretends not to be crippled
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. calls Vivian a whore
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. sells lunches to cotton gin workers
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. prays long prayers over Sunday breakfast
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. is sentenced to one year and one day
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. breaks old Virginia dishes
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. reads the Almanac while Maya reads *Jane Eyre*
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. is doorman at the Breakers
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. fears lesbianism
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. asks Marguerite to be his valentine

### Part IV: Matching (20 points)

Identify the location of the following events. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| _____ 1. Maya awakens and finds faces staring in the window.  | A. Bailey's trailer                     |
| _____ 2. Daddy Bailey collapses in a drunken stupor.          | B. California Labor School              |
| _____ 3. Negroes move into former Japanese neighborhoods.     | C. Colored Methodist Episcopal Church   |
| _____ 4. Dolores stabs Maya.                                  | D. George Washington High School        |
| _____ 5. Maya studies drama and dance.                        | E. junkyard                             |
| _____ 6. Miss Kirwin teaches current events.                  | F. Lafayette County Training School     |
| _____ 7. City kids seem shockingly backward.                  | G. Mexico                               |
| _____ 8. Maya forgets her part and runs out the door.         | H. Mission High School                  |
| _____ 9. Mr. Donleavy makes a speech.                         | I. San Francisco                        |
| _____ 10. Summer school class graduates two days after V-Day. | J. Toussaint L'Ouverture Grammar School |

## Answer Key

### VOCABULARY

- |                   |                  |
|-------------------|------------------|
| 1. gnome          | 11. expeditious  |
| 2. chronicle      | 12. aura         |
| 3. subversive     | 13. diabolic     |
| 4. blasé          | 14. rife         |
| 5. tribulation    | 15. servile      |
| 6. dawdling       | 16. banshee      |
| 7. inevitably     | 17. venue        |
| 8. desiccated     | 18. sobriquet    |
| 9. pantomime      | 19. moiré        |
| 10. metamorphosis | 20. commensurate |

### COMPREHENSION TEST A

#### Part I: Quotation Identification (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. J | 6. I  |
| 2. K | 7. F  |
| 3. G | 8. C  |
| 4. L | 9. D  |
| 5. H | 10. B |

#### Part III: True/False (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. T | 6. F  |
| 2. T | 7. F  |
| 3. F | 8. F  |
| 4. F | 9. T  |
| 5. T | 10. T |

#### Part II: Completion (30 points)

- |                  |                           |
|------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Margaret      | 9. man                    |
| 2. pantomime     | 10. Uncle Willie          |
| 3. Poe           | 11. Bailey Junior         |
| 4. hearts        | 12. Daddy Bailey          |
| 5. Uncle Willie  | 13. Grandfather Baxter    |
| 6. Bailey Junior | 14. Momma                 |
| 7. Vivian        | 15. Negro national anthem |
| 8. Spanish       |                           |

#### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

### COMPREHENSION TEST B

#### Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. B | 6. D  |
| 2. C | 7. A  |
| 3. A | 8. D  |
| 4. C | 9. A  |
| 5. B | 10. B |

#### Part II: Essay (30 points)

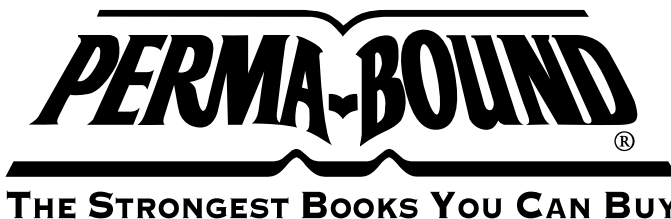
Answers will vary.

#### Part III: Character Identification (30 points)

- |                       |                        |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Vivian             | 8. Momma               |
| 2. Marguerite or Maya | 9. Elder Thomas        |
| 3. Grandmother Baxter | 10. Mr. Freeman        |
| 4. Bailey Junior      | 11. Marguerite or Maya |
| 5. Bailey Junior      | 12. Uncle Willie       |
| 6. Uncle Willie       | 13. Daddy Bailey       |
| 7. Dolores Stockland  | 14. Marguerite or Maya |
|                       | 15. Tommy Valdon       |

#### Part IV: Matching (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. E | 6. D  |
| 2. G | 7. J  |
| 3. I | 8. C  |
| 4. A | 9. F  |
| 5. B | 10. H |



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