

Still i rise



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

“ Still I Rise” is a powerful poem written by Maya Angelou addressing her pride in herself and in her African American ancestor’s ability to rise above racism and segregation. The tone of the poem is strong and expresses different hardships that Maya Angelou has been faced with and overcame. Angelou uses a wide range of similes and metaphors in her poem comparing herself to various natural elements such as the moon, sun and ocean to represent how she approached each circumstance.

In numerous works by Maya Angelou, her writing style incorporates numerous symbols, similes, and various emotions. In “ Still I Rise” Maya Angelou is the speaker and the audience is the white race who has oppressed her in the past and doubted her future. The poem reflects on the history of slaves and African Americans when she says in lines 39-40, “ Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave, / I am the dream and the hope of the slave”. Due to her history, she wants to be powerful and successful in her future. She refers to herself in stanza eight as a “ black ocean” which represents her strength and power.

Angelou also shows her self-confidence in the beginning of stanzas two, four, five, and seven, by posing several rhetorical questions which are used to prove to the reader never to doubt her in her future endeavors. Angelou incorporates her past experiences, powerful views expressed in the tone regarding her pride, feminist values, strong confidence, and close ties with African American ancestry to create a timeline of events that have allowed her to push forward in life despite obstacles from her and her ancestor’s past and face future challenges with zero fear.

Angelou incorporates her childhood and personal experiences with segregation in "Still I Rise" to show how the past does not define her, but influences her to become strong, successful, and accomplished. Mary Angelou grew up in Arkansas with her grandmother. She experienced racial discrimination while living in the south and was traumatically raped at age seven. Her first-hand encounters with racism and horrendous sexual assault at an early age fueled her to write this powerful poem. Growing up, she was treated unequally and saw how African Americans were treated as inferior compared to the surrounding Caucasian race. "Still I Rise" is her way of proving that African Americans, like herself, have struggled for decades through a rough and strenuous path that has finally made them equal (Kite 1-11). In stanza eight she talks about overcoming pain and embarrassment left upon her race in the past. "Out of the huts of history's shame/ I rise/ Up from a past that's rooted in pain/ I rise/ I am a black ocean, leaping and wide" (Angelou 29-33).

In these lines, Angelou uses a metaphor to show how despite a painful and horrific past, her and her ancestors have been able to rise above discrimination and act as powerful as an ocean. In the second, third, and fourth stanzas, she addresses her wealth. Despite obstacles, she was able to become a successful woman. She makes this point by saying "I've got oil wells" (7), "I've got gold mines" (19) and "I've got diamonds" to represent her stability and wealth as a confident woman.

She lived in an era where women were not the sole income provider or out in the work force, so lines seven, nineteen, and twenty-two prove she has found her own personal wealth in her life and carries herself with pride for all

her achievements. Angelou's first-hand encounters and experiences in her life directly correlate to the tone of the poem and the forceful, emotional attitude expressed in each stanza. The tone of the poem is serious, yet positive.

She takes her personal experiences and turns them into motivation and lessons that help her show that she will rise above and succeed in any challenge that she faces. Stanza six is specifically structured to emphasize the action verbs in each line. " You may shoot me with your words, /You may cut me with your eyes, /You may kill me with your hatefulness" (22-24). The actions of shooting, cutting, and killing are very abrupt yet painful processes. They are all one syllable verbs that were chosen specifically to represent harm done to the African-Americans.

The harm that was done to her when she was a child is expressed in lines 25-28. " Does my sexiness upset you? / Does it come as a surprise,/ That I dance like I've got diamonds/ At the meeting of my thighs? "(25-28). After being raped and traumatized Maya Angelou apparently spent years as a mute (Kite 12). Once she overcomes her fears, she was able to show off her sexy and wealthy new life and confidence. Diamonds are very expensive and pure. This line can represent her worth and how she associates herself with a beautiful pure diamond.

By incorporating past experiences, encounters with the treatment of African Americans, her self-worth, Angelou is able to create an emotional, passionate tone that reflects a timeline of events in history in the last stanza based on the structure and word choice. For example, " Up from a past that's rooted in pain/I rise/I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide" (31-33). An issue or

topic is presented, then “ I rise” follows. Like a ladder, there are many steps in order to succeed. She is presented with one issue, faces it, succeeds, and then repeats the same process with another issue.

Over time in history, Angelou’s African American ancestors crawled many steps along a ladder in order to rise above discrimination. The imaginary ladder and the ancestors who begin climbing are in pain and distress whereas the narrator ends up at the top of the ladder feeling hopeful and able to reflect on the lower steps of the ladder as lessons and achievements. The last three lines sum up the entire purpose of “ Still I Rise” with the use of repetition. “ I rise” is repeated three times in the last stanza and ten times overall in the poem.

This repetition resembles a chant that Angelou recites to herself to remind her and the reader about her ability to overcome any challenge given to her and push forward into the future. This repetition also emphasizes how she is a strong, confident, proud African American. There is no one that will stop her from achieving and succeeding and she will continue to rise and be as powerful. Maya Angelou’s experiences growing up during a racist era in history and the struggles of her past African American ancestors contributed to the tone in “ Still I Rise” which emphasized Angelou’s strong ideals and self-confidence.

The tone of “ Still I Rise” is powerful and allows the reader to understand how events in the past have inspired the narrator to be successful, pride, and hopeful. An emotional and eventful ladder was created in the last stanza to enhance the poem and show that each step of the ladder represented an

event and an emotion that changed as each step was climbed by the reader and past ancestors.

Works Cited

1. Kite, L. Patricia. Maya Angelou. Connecticut: Twenty First Century, 1999. Print. Biography.
2. " Still I Rise. " Poets. Org. Academy of American Poets, Web. 12 Mar. 2013. .