

I know why the caged
bird sings influences
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A Lifetime of Influence Marguerite Johnson had a harsh childhood growing up in the South during the days of cotton picking and slavery. All of the adversity she encountered when she was young inspired her to write the book *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. In it, she depicts what life was like growing up in the small town of Stamps, Arkansas, and illustrates the daily hardships that were roadblocks throughout her life. Many people help her overcome these obstructions in her young life, but it was the people closest to her who enable her to rise above the adversity she faced. Although a vast number of people came into and out of her life, only a few made a lasting impression on her. Bailey, Mrs. Flowers, and Momma were the biggest role models throughout her childhood and also had the most positive influences on her.

Bailey had a very unique relationship with Maya; they grew up together and shared everything. They were inseparable and experienced everything side by side. Whenever they got into trouble, they experienced it together and, if they didn't do it together, they were punished equally anyway. When Maya said "by the way," Momma not only whipped Maya for cursing, but she whipped Bailey and their friend Junior as well without a reason. She whipped all three of them so they all would know what would happen to them if they cursed. In Momma's eyes Bailey and Maya were to be treated equally because she wanted to raise both of them the same, thus when one was punished the other one was too.

When Bailey experienced sex for the first time with Vivian, Maya was right there outside the tent. There was nothing that they didn't do together, and when they grew distant as they aged, Maya confessed that it was one of her

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most painful experiences. During a volatile time in her life, Bailey was the one she turned to. After Mr. Freeman raped her, she was traumatized and shut everyone out, except Bailey. He was the only one she felt comfortable talking to and that shows how close their relationship was. He felt her pain after the rape and even cried for her. Growing up, Bailey was the crutch that Maya could lean on in times when she questioned herself or life in general.

Another character that had a major role in shaping Maya's personality was Mrs. Flowers. Mrs. Flowers made Maya Angelou feel proud to be black. In the first few pages of the book, Maya Angelou describes how Maya perceives herself to be very ugly, and she is ashamed to be black. She even wishes she were white, until she meets Mrs. Flowers. Mrs. Flowers is everything Maya aspires to be. " She was one of the few gentlewomen I have ever known, and has remained throughout my life the measure of what a human being can be" (Angelou 94). This very refined black woman gave her the wings she needed to rise above adversity in her life, she also gave her an example of what she could grow up to be if she put her mind to it. At a time when Maya hated who she was, Mrs. Flowers gave her inspiration to be a better woman. She was an example that Maya would look up to and follow for the rest of her life.

Maya also gained valuable knowledge from her sessions with Mrs. Flowers. Maya already loved reading, but Mrs. Flowers amplified her experience with poetry, writing and general literature. Maya became a more educated young lady due to her meetings with Mrs. Flowers and kept the knowledge she gained from her for the rest of her life. Maya learned to speak out, and in a sophisticated manner, to voice her opinions. The time at which Mrs. Flowers

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came into Mayas life, made her role even more valuable, it came after the rape when Maya confined herself to a blank world of silence. Maya would develop and mature from the lessons she learned from Mrs. Flowers Lastly, Momma was the single most important person in Maya's young life. The list of ways in which she affected Maya is endless, and her immense authority over her is impossible to even begin to convey. Momma, who was, in fact, Maya's grandmother, was a part of her life ever since Maya and Bailey were shipped to her when they were very young.

She raised them according to stern Christian values and strict rules and didn't stand for any nonsense. Momma never displayed much emotion, and was a very strong lady spiritually, physically and mentally. Nevertheless, Maya experienced Momma's love in other ways and looked up to her as a role model and hero. " People spoke of Momma as a good-looking woman and some, who remembered her youth, said she used to be right pretty. I saw only her power and strength" (46). Maya admired her and she served as a pillar that Maya's life stood upon and depended on.

Her life would have been dramatically different if Momma had not have been such a strong willed and powerful person. Everyday Maya learned from her whether it is from the way Momma was tolerant of the " powwhitefolk" or the way she let the workers amass great bills, knowing they could not pay, Maya absorbed it all. Momma may not have been very smart, but she always had the right answer for Maya she was always right and supported her throughout her childhood similar to the way Bailey supported her. Momma's daily influences, both great and small, shaped who Maya was and eventually who she would become. Maya took all the lessons she gained from her and <https://assignbuster.com/i-know-why-the-caged-bird-sings-influences-on-maya-essay-sample/>

kept them throughout her life, which is why Momma was one of the utmost influences on her.

Many people in Maya Angelou's young life had a powerful sway over her, but Bailey, Mrs. Flowers, and Momma were the key positive role models and helped her rise above her less fortunate position in life. Each of these people impacted Maya in different ways, but all of them shaped her personality. They all acted as support mechanisms for her while she was growing up in turbulent times. Numerous times Maya turned to each one of these people to guide her as she grew up. They were the most essential people in her life, and they made lasting impressions on her. Each left their individual mark on her that would stay with her for the rest of her life.