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Maya Angelou

Introduction

In 4th April 1928, Maya was born and named as Marguerite Ann Johnson, a daughter to Vivian Baxter and Bailey Johnson who was a dietitian for the United States Navy. Her year old brother, Bailey was unable to pronounce her name and he usually called her either “ my-a-sister” or “ my sister.” As a result, the brother contributed to the birth of her new nickname as “ Maya.” However, the nickname, Maya, was not recognized by other people until her adulthood, when she converted her real name to Maya Angelou, in 1949, as a professional and stage name.

Thesis: The paper focuses on the life of Maya accompanied by the events that accompanied her during her life.

At the age of three, and her brother four, Maya’s parent separated through divorce. The situation forced children to relocate to their parental grandmothers who lived in Stamps, Arkansas. The grandmother, Ms. Henderson, worked in a thriving general store. The children started experiencing challenges of life such as being separated with their parents to the extent they were sent to their grandmother alone by train, regardless of their age. Maya and her brother lived with their grandmother and the disabled uncle for four years until her father returned them to the care of their mother who lived in St. Louis. They later relocated to their grandmother’s place and once again returned to their mother, in St. Louis, after Maya had completed her grammar school. Throughout her life, Maya and Bailey lived closely and maintained a consistent presence of each other.

While living with their mother in St. Louis, Maya was raped by boyfriend to

her mother. Having lived closely, Maya was able to share an incident with her brother who later narrated the incident to his grandmother. The rapist accepted that he was guilty, but he was later killed by Maya's uncle only after he completed his one day life in jail. After the murder of a man who raped her, Maya spent about five years of her life without speaking. After the murder, the two children returned to their grandmother.

Maya's life was later enlightened by Mrs. Flowers, a woman who empowered and influenced the black people in Stamps. Mrs. Flowers discovered the potential in Maya, due to her brightness and voracious reader skills. She influenced and challenged Maya to read as many books as possible arguing that the words only acquire the full meaning if they are spoken. Through Mrs. Flowers' influence, Maya regained her voice and was able to speak.

Maya was admitted in a school High School in San Francisco, which was primarily meant for the white people. During high school age as a teenager, she experienced teen issues that involved her own identity. She seduced a local teen to sleep with her and became pregnant. She gave birth to a son, Clyde, after high school graduation. In her high school life, she got an opportunity to work as a conductor of the street car, hence acquiring a record to the first African American to perform such task.

As a single mother, she engaged in numerous marriages but none of the relationship was successful. She also faced other tribulations such as poverty, traumas, and also kidnapping of Clyde. She started to write poetry and songs at young adulthood, and she engaged in various activities such as dancing, acting and singing. During her tour in Europe, she learned several languages such as Italian, French, Spanish, Arabic, fluent English and West

African Fanti. In 1950's she started the work of writing with Harlem Writer's Guild and later wrote variety of literature such as screenplays, poetry, prose, and short stories among other. She was later involved in the Civil Rights Movement. For many years, they lived together with her son in African countries such as Egypt, Ghana and Cairo. She relocated to the United States where she was involved in the writing of Martin Luther King, Jr. before she met her death she had written six volumes of autobiographic.

Analysis of a work of fiction:

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Angelou Maya describe her life from age three to seventeen pointing the struggles that she underwent in her life. The author talks about racial discrimination in southern United States. After Maya's parents abandoned them, situations dictated them to go in Stamps, Arkansas to live with their grandmother and the crippled uncle. In this place, Maya and Bailey are racially abused and this haunts them throughout the book.

At the begging of the book, the author appears as an intelligent young girl who suffered from traumas due to racial discrimination. Maya faces a hard time since she is a black woman living in America. The author also faces the shock of displacement since it takes time before she adapts to the environment. Clever and creative, Maya believes that the Americans were unfair to her because of her unattractive appearance. Feeling misjudged, Maya visualizes herself as a blond-haired, blue-eyed girl entombed in a "black ugly dream." Later on, she wakes up to the reality of being a black woman. She uses "unnecessary insults" to describe the setbacks of being a black girl a place where segregation was the order of the day. In her life, in

Southern America, Maya is described with three remarkable weaknesses: black powerlessness, white prejudice and female suppression.

Besides the obstacles she faced in the society, Maya undergoes personal traumas in her entire life. After the abandonment by her parents, Mr. Freeman assaulted and raped her. The racist employer planned to change her real name to Mary. At the time she was ten, she had observed the callous whites oppressing the most significant people in her life, such as Momma. As Mrs. Cullinan insulted her with names to demean her dignity, she starts to face racism directly affecting her life. Maya is also the subject of racial discrimination as the white doctor refuses to treat her rotten teeth and says, “ I would rather stick my hands in a dog’s mouth than treat Maya.” The doctor disregards that Momma had helped him during the economic depression with a loan.

In her final year, in school, Maya doubts that she is a lesbian and tries to pledge for sexual intercourse. Unluckily, she becomes pregnant but never exposes it to her family. When the pregnancy attains eight months, Maya tells her family about it at the same time she was expecting to graduate. In the end, Maya delivers a bouncing baby. Her life experiences inspired her to write about the persistent racial discrimination that the black people experienced. She describes the events that directly touched her life and that of the family.

Through her autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou touches hearts and changes many people’s mind by revealing the true pangs of racism, sexual prejudice, independence, identity, and community. Her work allows us to disclose the recipe for a fictional juggernaut. She mixes

some parts of romance, adventure and her biography. The release of the book was followed by widespread censorship and critical acclaim. Maya offers significant intuitions into the world of cultural isolation, and excruciatingly records the toll taken by prejudice in its different forms. Maya demonstrates how most of the Americans were shamefully ignorant about the real problems that were threatening to engrave the American society. Maya clearly states that, “ his wings are clipped and, his feet are tied, so he opens his throat to sing.” In her piece, Maya indicates how the whites oppressed the blacks. Their urge to obtain freedom was hacked by constant detainment as clearly indicated by “ clipped wings.” Those Activists who thwarted the whites’ vision of continuing to dominate over the blacks were ‘ clipped.’ Additionally, Maya explores the struggles undergone by women in a highly chauvinistic society where men had total authority while women were decision-takers. Their dreams of gaining freedom became hazy day by day. “ But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams.” Maya uses the experience of a young girl being raped by an old man. A description of the entire experience provokes readers both emotionally and intellectually. Remarkably, rape has been used as a metaphor for the suffering of Maya’s black race. Her people keep on fearing knowing not what will happen the next day. “ The caged bird sings with a fearful trill of things unknown.” In her tender years, common forces of nature assault the black female. She is also caught in the multilateral antagonism of the male preconception, Black lack of power, and irrational hate from the whites. Perpetuity in the process of becoming dying and reborn is depicted in the unsettled life of the “ caged bird.” In the masterpiece, Maya depicts the struggle of women in her

society by using a caged bird to represent the oppressed women struggling to free themselves from the chains of oppression. Maya converts the black woman from a casualty of racism with a subsidiarity complex into a self-assured, exalted woman proficient of responding to prejudice. The feeling of not belonging dominates throughout the work. Maya does this not to condemn the black women but to raise their consciousness about their rights and freedoms.

Throughout her work, the image painted is that of a bird trying to escape from its cage. “Wings are clipped and his feet are tied so he opens his throat to sing.” Maya demonstrates how black Americans were struggling to free themselves from oppression and gain freedom. Additionally, Maya indicates how her society holds miniscule expectations about women by perceiving them not as their equals, but as lesser important human beings. By writing a book, Maya was striving to honor the Black experience and uphold the human spirit.

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