

Good i know why the caged bird sings literature review example

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Maya Angelou's "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings", published in 1969, is an autobiographical look into the coming-of-age years of the African-American author. Throughout the novel, Angelou's discusses themes such as racism and segregation that she experienced, simply for being African American. She also discusses experiencing displacement throughout this period in her life, living in seven different homes in a relatively short period of time. There is also an overwhelming theme that speaks to Angelou's resistance to racism; all of these culminated to form Angelou's social identity. She covers many different events that helped shape her life, including the unfortunate instance in which she was raped, as well as an incident where a white man speaks at her eighth-grade graduation. Angelou's novel is truly an inspiring look into the oppression that we as a society have allowed others to face, as well as the consequences that can take hold. But it is a testament to the human spirit and the beautiful stories that can be found, even in the darkest parts of human history.

Angelou employs many themes through "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" in order to get many points across in her writing. One of the more obvious themes involves the racism and segregation Angelou and her community faced on a daily basis. Angelou proves herself as a precocious individual when she begins to confront these themes as young as seven and eight years old. She begins to internalize the idea that she is a fat African American trapped in a bad dream, while if she could only have been born with light hair, she would be seen as beautiful. This helps to show how deeply profound the effects of racism can be, even on a child. As she grows, she is confronted with other forms of racism and segregation, such as a

condescending speech given by a white man at her all black eighth-grade graduation, or her white boss's insistence on calling her by the wrong name, as if to prove she is not worthy of the smallest courtesy. A white dentist even refuses to treat her.

Another theme Angelou used through her novel was displacement. Between the ages of three and sixteen she had lived in seven different homes, all stationed between California, to St. Louis, and everywhere in between. As she sees more of the country, she becomes more aware of racism, and it makes it very difficult for her to let her guard down or remain comfortable in any of the homes her family temporarily settles in. After facing a lifetime of degradation, she finally feels at home in San Francisco at the age of 13. She feels that the area is full of displaced individuals and is able to identify with a population that is not solely African American for the first time in her life. Her displacement speaks to the journey many African American families traveled at that time. Promised good jobs and decent lives in northern towns, many African American children made the same moves Angelou did, only to move back to the south when the northern prosperity revealed itself as a lie. This continues displacement showed that the end of slavery was not the end of the struggle.

The most overwhelming theme of "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" was Angelou's eventual rejection of racism. This theme is also represented as several characters in the book also reject racism in a variety of ways.

Momma rejects racism by remaining realistic and not interacting with others. She believes that by not engaging in typical behaviors she is not degrading herself and, therefore, not participating in racism. As a result she is rejecting

it. Daddy Clidell eventually turns the prejudice and racism of white people toward African Americans into a scheme that can make him money. He participates in racism, but only for his own gain. Bailey drapes himself in wealth, buying expensive clothes and an extravagant car in order to show that he is worth something. Racism has effectively emasculated him through his childhood and adolescence. As a result, he also has several affairs with many women in an attempt to reassert his masculinity. Vivian's family uses underground connections to assert force and if anybody attempts to harass them, they stop it. Maya begins resisting racism by smashing her white employer's priceless china. Eventually, in an act of public defiance, she becomes San Francisco's first African American streetcar conductor.

Throughout her childhood, racism and oppression forced Angelou into wishing she had been born white, or at least with lighter hair. As she grew, racism gave her the strength to defy it and help stand for civil rights. While racism is unacceptable, Angelou became a stronger person because of it. Events that shaped Angelou's life are also included in the novel. When she was eight years old, Angelou was raped. Mr. Freeman was her rapist, and he threatens to kill her brother if she tells anybody of the rape. As a result, Angelou lies at his trial, saying that the rape was the first time he touched her inappropriately. Later, Mr. Freeman is murdered, it is assumed by one of Angelou's relatives. She feels guilty for the sexual assault as well as for her attacker's death, believing her words to be the reason Mr. Freeman died. This critical event was so traumatic Angelou resolved not to talk to anybody but Bailey, and followed through for the next five years. In order to cope, Angelou eventually realized that her words did not bring death, that she was

loved, and that her story could help save others. Another incident that might be described as social or political, that helped shape Angelou's life, was when Edward Donleavy spoke at her eighth-grade graduation. Rather than commend the present students on their efforts, applaud their achievements, or encourage them, Donleavy speaks about all of the wonderful things that have been happening at the white school. He insinuates that black students should focus on sports because they could never hope to have any true talents in academics, and Angelou begins to think she has no control over her life as a black girl. Henry Reed's valedictorian speech attempts to save the night but Angelou reacts with cynicism until "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing" begins and Angelou finally begins to take pride in her community. It is the first time she realizes that being African American does not matter, but being human is what counts.

My worldviews and views on life do not always match up with those of Maya Angelou, but that could only be because she is better spoken than I am. The overwhelming message of "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" appeared to be that racism was, and still is, a prominent issue. It is something with the potential to impact every individual it touches and it is up to us how we cope with the effects. As far as this worldview is concerned, I have no differing opinion. I believe that though racism may still not be as severe as it once was, it is still an issue, and it can impact everybody in a very serious way. How we let it affect us emotionally and mentally is ultimately up to us but the climate it creates is still unfair to many. Though an individual does not let it affect them emotionally, it does not mean racism will stop them from being treated differently.

“ I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” was many inspiring and insightful. It was tragic and dramatic but this forcefulness was necessary to get the devastating nature of racism and oppression across to the reader. There were many observations I made as I read that would impact my future actions on behalf of an oppressed group. To begin with, change does not happen by itself and it does not happen because one person decided to change it. Many people have to decide that it is time for a change. Whether collectively as a whole or through a series of unconnected efforts, change must happen through a forceful push given by the masses, and I would want to be a part of that push. Another thing I observed was there is no resistance too small or large to make an impact. Vivian’s meager decision to disengage from racist culture was enough to leave its mark, while Angelou decided to make more noise in the form of smashing china and becoming the first African American streetcar conductor. I observed through reading the novel that, no matter the action, it matters. In the future, whatever I could do to help, I would.

In sum, “ I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” by Maya Angelou was an autobiography that granted insight and tragic observation into what racism and segregation were like during Angelou’s coming of age. The many themes Angelou used throughout the autobiography weave together to show the tense climate and how difficult it was to stimulate change. Several events in Angelou’s life, such as her rape and her eighth-grade graduation’s speaker were both tragic and inspiring, showing how the events of that era were often fueled by discrimination and shaped why Angelou became. I was able to take many things away from the novel. Angelou’s worldviews coincided

with my own and I now have a better understanding of how to fight oppression now and in the future.