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Introduction Throughout Maya Angelou's life, she uses her love of writing to share and comprehend the experiences that make her stronger. Since she is black and a woman, she struggles to find her voice in a world where she is constantly caged. As a young girl growing up in segregated Arkansas in the 1930s, Angelou experiences first hand what it means to be a black girl. She continually feels the strain of society, which leads her to one of her darkest times, being raped at eight years old. In all of Angelou's autobiographies, she struggles to find herself in a world where she does not fit, but through every turn she finds a missing puzzle piece to complete her life.

In Arkansas; she discovers her love of reading and writing, in California; she overcomes the pain of letting go and in New York; she realizes the impact of African culture on black society; all of these findings make Angelou the woman she is, someone who is fearless in life. In Maya Angelou's first book, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, she touches upon her broken childhood, what it means to grow up in segregated south and how she overcomes an emotional situation. One example of this is seen when Angelou is raped at eight years old by her mother's boyfriend, Mr. Freedmen. At first she comments, " I didn't want to admit that I had in fact liked his holding me or that I had liked his smell or the hard heart-beating, so I said nothing" (78), but then during the rape she says, " Then there was pain. A breaking and entering when even the senses are torn apart.

.. I thought I had died" (78). These quotes represent the confusion and most of all the earth-shattering pain flooding through Angelou. While she enjoys his holding before because she sees it as affection from a father-like figure, she feels violated and " torn apart" by what he eventually does to her.

This act stays with Angelou throughout her life and she finds it difficult to carry on. When Mr. Freedmen goes to court, he “ was [only] given one year and one day, but he never got the chance to do his time. His lawyer (or someone) got him released that very afternoon” (85). When the court asks Angelou to speak against Mr. Freedmen, she is so nervous and scared that it is hard for her to admit what he did and he gets away as a free man.

The court sides with the rapist black man over the vulnerable black girl and there is nothing Angelou can do about it. Following the rape, Angelou believes she “ had to stop talking” (87). She stops talking for a whole year. She starts treating herself as a victim of rape and she feels there is no use to combat it, until Mrs. Flowers.

When Mrs. Flowers, an older, nurturing woman, asks Maya to take a book of poems and memorize one for her, Maya suddenly feels this overwhelming sense of pride and comfort. She is able to get a glimpse of the “ private lives of strangers and to share their joys and fears” (100). After being isolated for a year, Angelou is able to redefine herself with words on pages. She feels loved by Mrs. Flowers and the characters of stories and this enables her to move on.

Throughout the autobiography, Angelou brings to life her adolescence self in a way that is personal and meaningful in every experience; her writing allows the reader to grow up alongside her. In addition to her challenging childhood in Arkansas, Angelou faces more obstacles, while also further developing her personality in Los Angeles, California. When writing about her life, Angelou is still weighed down by her past. This can be seen in the

excerpt, " The paramount chief Nana Nketsi IV assured me that he would pay sharp attention to Guy..

. They promised to give me a monthly report on how he was faring, so I should feel at ease. Of course I didn't. From the moment I bought my ticket, guilt called out my name. Guy was nineteen, and I, who had been his shade since he was born, was leaving him under the the broiling African sun" (23).

She feels guilty because her own parents were not in her life as a child.

Although her son is nineteen, she still wishes she could be there for him and make up for lost time by her own parents. Throughout her California visit, she longs for Guy to be with her. She does not want to abandon him and has a hard time with letting him live his own life because she had to do the same. Another example of Angelou learning to let go is when Malcolm X is assassinated.

The main reason for Angelou to go back to the United States is to work with him during the Civil Rights Movement (" I had returned from Africa to give my energies and wit to the OAAU, and Malcolm was dead" (28)). Maya Angelou is so devastated by the loss of her friend, brother and hero. This can be seen in the excerpt, " My bloated face and swollen eyes told me I had cried, but I didn't remember and didn't want to remember" (28). She becomes reclusive and does not know what to do with her life. She is shocked by the lack of black people mourning his death.

As Maya and her brother enter a bar, she notices that there are black men and women flirting and having fun, as though their leader Malcolm X did not just die. When he dies, she figures that he has a strong impact in the states, <https://assignbuster.com/maya-angelou-free-essay-sample-essay-samples/>

but this is not true and she takes it extremely hard when no one seems to care. Afraid of loss, she turns to a pastime of hers, which is singing and soars above the cage away from despair. California is just another stepping stone in discovering Angelou's identity and she is forced to face sorrow and guilt again as an adult. This only makes her stronger and more ready for a new life ahead in a new city. Afterwards in New York, Maya Angelou learns about how her own African culture has made an impact on America's black society, which helps to tie together the loose ends of her missing identity.

One example of how Maya Angelou brings together this cultural impact is through her documentary series, Blacks. Blues. Black. She describes the program detailing " African culture's impact on the west. As host, I would introduce the lyricism of poetry and the imagery of prose. In one program I would have B.

B. King playing blues and church choirs singing spirituals and gospel songs..." (204). She further relates influences on dance and sculpture seen in western culture. This quote demonstrates all the different ways Maya Angelou brings her two worlds together. She spends much of her time learning how to write for television, interview properly and create a series that inspires her people for years to come. In addition, the response Angelou receives from her documentary series is overwhelming.

Evidence of her new-found popularity can be seen in the excerpt, " The Sun Times, the local black newspaper, gave it [documentary series] a rousing view...People who had looked askance when I began the series were now standing in line to participate. Schools had adopted the programs, and I was

told that some preachers were using my subjects as topics for their sermons in San Francisco” (208). The series receives such enormous praise from all walks of life, and it not only helps Angelou, but encourages others to self identify as black and also African.

The quote above also gives the well-deserving praise to Angelou that she has deserved her whole life. For the longest time, she deals with many setbacks. The documentary represents an achievement for her and the self confidence she finally gains. All the respect and love Maya Angelou receives enables her to come out of her shell, fully discover her identity as an African black woman, and share her life to everyone. Conclusion Throughout Maya Angelou’s life, she meets new places and new experiences with open and worldly eyes, whether it is getting over a troubling situation, or moving on after a death or even discovering more of her own culture’s impact in today’s society. In every instance, she learns more about herself and the power she has from being a black woman.

From my readings of Maya Angelou, I have discovered that her life was not the easiest, but in fact the most rewarding. In her life, she was met with devastation after devastation, only to have her love of words uplift her. When reading I noticed she has this brilliant ability to write her life like a story. At times I was so immersed in the story she was telling that I forgot that these events were real, that these situations happened to her. She used location to clearly represent what she learned and gained from each encounter of her life and I found that fascinating. Works Cited Angelou, Maya.

A Song Flung Up to Heaven. New York: Random House, 2002. Print. Angelou, Maya. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. New York: Random House, 1969.

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