

# Maya angelou and phenomenal woman essay



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“ All of my work is meant to say, ‘ You may encounter many defeats but you must not be defeated.’ In fact, the encountering may be the very experience which creates the vitality and the power to endure.” – As quoted in The Norton Anthology of African American Literature.

Where are you as a woman? No matter where it is, Maya Angelou, born Marguerite Johnson (1928) in St. Louis, MO helps any woman define herself in her poem “ Phenomenal Woman.” The definition has nothing to do with looks, popularity, or hair length or color. How do you feel about yourself inside and in relation to others? Angelou speaks about that in this poem, too. Possibly, “ Phenomenal Woman” is a woman’s primer for self-confidence.

Each stanza of the poem ends with the line, “ I’m a woman/Phenomenally/Phenomenal woman. That’s me.” While the poem speaks of a woman’s charms, it does not subscribe to perfectionism lauded in society. Instead, a phenomenal woman finds buoyancy in being unique. It is her milieu. She follows no one except herself. She does not hitch onto anyone else’s star, but creates her own galaxy. The repeated lines may be a self-assurance mantra or a way to allow this characteristic to become vitally apart of the mind and spirit. Whichever it is, any woman who says them may feel like she wants to find the nearest mirror and repeat them or smiling at herself, knowing, “ Yes, this is what I am.”

In approximately sixty lines, Angelou describes how to feel like the title of the poem. It does contain not fashion, hair, makeup, or diet advice. Any number of magazines and websites devote themselves to these topics. The crux of the poem is attitude. In a woman’s attitude, she finds poise,

sensuality, and ability to hold her head up high. In addition she finds vigor to experience these things. Attitude, more than anything, creates the mystique described in Phenomenal Woman.

Charisma cannot be shown or described to someone else. Even if it is, one woman's allure doesn't fit another. Additional aspects of being a phenomenal woman are motion, grace, and demeanor. Contemporary African American poet, Lucille Clifton, describes it in her poem "Homage to My Hips," "...these hips/are free hips/they don't like to be held back...." And so, too, is it a quality of a phenomenal woman, who does not like to be held back. A phenomenal woman moves as if nothing troubles her world. She moves as if everything about her is secure.

An unparalleled woman does not have to tell the world how special they are. "I don't shout or jump about/or have to talk real loud." She's like a painting, admired by viewers, which shows its beauty by hanging on a wall. A phenomenal woman demonstrates her beauty by being herself. Her demeanor has nothing to do with pride, though, she's proud of who she is without being overbearing.

As a poet, Dr. Maya Angelou is an incredibly inspirational to women, in addition to the world. She wrote her poems and novel *Now I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* from experientially poignant depths. She is not only a poet, but also, "memoirist, novelist, educator, dramatist, producer, actress, historian, filmmaker, and civil rights activist." Maybe all she does and is holds the key to understanding the meaning and words of "Phenomenal Woman," since it describes the poet so well.

Women spend millions of dollars annually on beauty magazines, joining clubs, or other ways to look younger, prettier, thinner, or whatever they think will make them perfect. “ Phenomenal Woman” depicts the most important aspect of beauty – it starts in the mind. The theme of this poem is not perfection, rather a woman can be all she needs in her attitude, and exactly how she is right in the moment. Then, everything else falls into place, since she has the required tools to create a woman diverse from all other women. She is no one else’s carbon copy.