

An analysis of the book i know why the caged bird sings essays examples

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



Maya Angelou's recurring line " sings of freedom" tells of how much she wanted to set herself free from the situation she was put into at a very young age. The book *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is a memoir that talks about Maya Angelou's tumultuous but sobering experiences in life, told in a straightforward manner without any filter. From an adult person's point of view, her experience was difficult to bear. She and her brother had to deal with their parents' divorce, then be shuffled back and forth from her grandmother to her mother, then to her grandmother again, then to her father then her grandmother again before they finally reunited and stayed with their mother. The feeling of being unwanted by their parents was hard to deal with for any children her age. She was three and her brother was four when they were shipped by their father to Stamps, Arkansas to live with their " Momma." They had tags on their wrists with the words " To whom it may concern," saying that they were Marguerite and Bailey Johnson, Jr. from Long Beach, California, and that they were to go to Stamps, Arkansas c/o Mrs. Annie Henderson. Despite it all, Maya Angelou found her own strength and became the smart and assured woman that she was who was never afraid to speak her mind. The caged bird was finally free.

Living with their grandmother in Arkansas, Maya Angelou was consistently subjected to bullying, in the streets, the school, or even in church. Stamps was an extremely racist place, and she was under the constant glare and ridicule of the people in town. This caused in her a great sense of inferiority growing up. She thought herself to be ugly, to which her grandmother assured her, " don't worry ' cause you ain't pretty! rather you have a good mind than a cute behind" (Angelou p. 66). Maya did not understand racism

and the idea of why people hurt and insult other people just because of the color of their skin. She was confused but found herself trying to come to terms with the injustices against black people like her. Just like other things that she had to endure as a child, racism carved a deep scar of understanding for her about life.

If anything, Maya's childhood was completely laden with confusion about the things going on around her. The tragedy of it was that the people who should have given her the clarity about the conflicting issues that she encountered were absent and unavailable. In the core of it all, her lack of attention from her parents made her develop several erroneous interpretation of things. For one, she thought Mr. Freeman's exploitative behavior towards her as the affection that she was not able to receive from her parents. When Mr. Freeman kept his distance after the second incident of molestation, she thought she made a mistake and that she was once again being rejected. When she was raped, she told no one about it in fear that he would kill Bailey. She thought that she made a mistake again that Mr. Freeman threatened her to do something as harsh as harming her brother. After it was discovered that Mr. Freeman actually raped her, she told a lie in court about the molestations in fear once again of being hated by her relatives for doing something that was wrong. Later on, when they learned that Mr. Freeman was beaten to death, Maya withdrew from the world and stopped talking, believing that it was her words that brought evil and harm to others. These realizations and self-loathing that Maya developed by keeping her thoughts to herself were unhealthy for a child, but Maya did not cast blame to others. She carried the guilt alone and dealt with it the way she knew how.

Luckily for her, Mrs. Bertha Flowers came to her life and gave her a new ray of hope.

She found her voice back as she met Mrs. Flowers who introduced her to books and reading, and with the beautiful words written on every page, she was able to regain her power to talk again. In her own words, Mrs. Flowers to Maya was “ her lifeline” and “ the true measure of what a human being can be” (Angelou p. 100). She learned from Mrs. Flowers “ lessons of living,” as Maya was taught how to make use of what Mrs. Flowers called “ mother wit” that she could learn from listening people when they talk (Angelou p. 99).

Angelou felt accepted for the first time, that she was liked and respected not because of blood relation but simply by being herself. She was praised for her hobby of reading, and was further taught that “ Words mean more than what is set down on paper.” (Angelou p. 98). Without being coerced to do it, she was encouraged to talk by Mrs. Flowers’s words about “ infusing the human voice with words” in order for the words to be more meaningful (Angelou p. 98). Maya carried with her the golden lessons she learned from Mrs. Flowers, and with them developed a stronger sense of self.

Maya had a long list of injustices under the hands of the oppressive whites who belittled and marked the destinies of black people like her. In her eighth grade graduation, an event that she was excited to witness after the small triumph she achieved with Mrs. Bertha, she was once again struck down by the words of the white speaker. He reduced the blacks to being athletes or servants later in their lives, while the whites were to be “ the Galileos and the Curies and the Edisons and Gaugins” (Angelou p. 174). Maya was once again disillusioned, but like all the other experiences she had, she took it all

in and learned from it. Her memoir is a living testament of how Maya was able to grow from “ inferiority complex to confidence” and finding it within her to face “ the puzzle of inequality and hate” as she became the first black streetcar conductor in San Francisco (Sethi 2013). The book outlines how Maya started out confused and angry about the injustices she witnessed, painting a picture of a girl helpless then finally learned how to resist despite the absence of confrontation before actively expressing vocally her protests against racism and oppression (Eller 1997). Despite the pain of being “ aware” and “ separate,” Maya grew up smart and reconciled the inconsistencies in her mind that do not make sense, and learned how to be “ always intolerant of ignorance, but understanding of illiteracy” (Angelou p. 99). Angelou survived it all and triumphed over it to become the wonderful person that she was before death claimed her. She survived because she must, and because she did, she was human (Eller 1997). More than anything, Maya’s memoir taught the readers that people have the capacity to “ do more than endure” (Eller 1997), and that she did. Like the forefathers of America who moved past the oppression they were dealt with during the period of colonization, Maya Angelou freed herself from the shackles holding her down. This makes a true American in every sense of the word.

Despite the positive messages that can be gleaned from the book, it was a surprise to learn that it was the ninth “ most challenged book” in American school (Moore 1993). Just as others appreciated the direct way of presenting the taboo but real issues of sexuality and violence, parents balked at its inclusion in school discussion where they say children are still too innocent to be tainted by such ideas. However, what the parents failed to consider is

that these issues are part of society's realities, that young children today are also plagued with the constant possibility of being subjected, if not already subjected, to the same sexual attacks and violence that Maya went through in her childhood years ago. The ugly truth did not change its name as it remained the same monster that victimized young, unsuspected children. In this day and time when young people are shaping their life choices based on what they constantly see on TV, magazines, movies, and advertisements, young people can benefit more from Maya's presentation of her experience of "self empowerment, faith, survival, struggle as quest, of how noble intellectual inquiry is, and the natural complexity that characterizes moral choice" (Moore 1993), albeit being presented in an adult concept. There is a need for the youth of today to learn that along with the beauty of life, there is also the harsh reality lurking not only in dark alleys but also in the comfort of their homes, disguised and masked. Everyone is bound to make their own choices in life, and Maya's story teaches making moral choices over the negative ones, the choice of life over death regardless of how difficult life may be, the choice of courage over safety, discipline over chaos, speaking up over silence, compassion over pity, hatred, or habit, and of being unable to move on from nonsensical recrimination and despair (Moore 1993).

Maya Angelou's growing up years is not exceptional and exclusive. There are others out there who have experienced the harsh realities of life in different forms but harsh and traumatic all the same. This is the sad reality of what has become of the society that should have brought people together to live in harmony as they reach towards a single goal. However, no matter how much people berate and question the presence of evil and tragedy in life,

humans are riddled with weaknesses that at some point overrode the good that they were also born with. The book is a strong reminder of these realities of life that became entangled and confused with other prevailing issues in life that people had to deal with. Through the book, the readers are provided with the opportunity to “ liberate themselves into life” and break free from “ narrow fearfulness” (Moore 1993), and in doing so be human in every sense of the word. People don’t have “ to think about doing the right thing” as “ if you’re for the right thing, then you do it without thinking” (Angelou p. 281).

References

Eller, Edward (1997). “ Novels for Students.” Gale. Retrieved from http://www.illinoisonlinehighschool.org/uploads/1/8/6/5/18653164/caged_bird_chapter_summaries.pdf.

Moore, Opal (1993). “‘Learning to Live’ When the Bird Breaks Free from the Cage.” Censored Books Critical Viewpoints. Retrieved from http://www.illinoisonlinehighschool.org/uploads/1/8/6/5/18653164/caged_bird_chapter_summaries.pdf.

Moore, Opal (1993). “‘Learning to Live’ When the Bird Breaks Free from the Cage.” Censored Books Critical Viewpoints. Retrieved from http://www.illinoisonlinehighschool.org/uploads/1/8/6/5/18653164/caged_bird_chapter_summaries.pdf.

Moore, Opal (1993). “‘Learning to Live’ When the Bird Breaks Free from the Cage.” Censored Books Critical Viewpoints. Retrieved from http://www.illinoisonlinehighschool.org/uploads/1/8/6/5/18653164/caged_bird_chapter_summaries.pdf.

Moore, Opal (1993). “‘Learning to Live’ When the Bird Breaks Free from the Cage.” Censored Books Critical Viewpoints. Retrieved from http://www.illinoisonlinehighschool.org/uploads/1/8/6/5/18653164/caged_bird_chapter_summaries.pdf.

Sethi, Anita (2013). “ I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou - review.”

The Guradian. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/aug/18/maya-angelou-caged-bird-review>.

The Guradian. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/aug/18/maya-angelou-caged-bird-review>.

<https://assignbuster.com/an-analysis-of-the-book-i-know-why-the-caged-bird-sings-essays-examples/>