

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## **I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings** **By Maya Angelou**

Maya Angelou has become known as one of America's foremost contemporary literary figures. She has read her poetry at the inauguration of a president, appeared in theatrical productions throughout the world, taught at a university, and even befriended and mentored Oprah. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings is the first book in a series that tells her life story. This segment covers her childhood years in the dusty, agricultural town of Stamps, Arkansas and her teen years in California. The book has been touted "a heroic and beautiful book" which shares the heart of the "black aesthetic." It does so in the universal context of a young girl growing up and finding herself. For these reasons, as well as for Angelou's moving prose, this autobiography appears on several published book lists for the most significant books for the college bound reader to experience.

Early in the book, Angelou writes of her struggle to grow up in a culture that afforded little opportunities for a talented, sensitive young black girl saying,

"If growing up is painful for the Southern Black girl, being aware of her displacement is the rust on the razor that threatens the throat.

It is an unnecessary insult."

It will be your job as the reader to trace the experiences which made life a challenge for Maya, making her feel as a caged bird feels. In doing so, it may afford you a better understanding of the "Black Experience." It also may enable you to recognize some common challenges you face as you grow up.

The book contains two objectionable elements that you may want to share with your parents or discuss with me. One of Angelou's greatest trials as a child occurred when she was raped by her mother's boyfriend. The memory of that scene is depicted as one a child must traumatically face in order to conquer it. Nevertheless, the images are graphic and disturbing. Later, in attempting to find her own sexual identity, Maya seeks out a one-night stand that ultimately has long lasting consequences. Should these true-life sequences cause a problem or objection for you, please contact me. It will be possible for you to read a replacement book.

### **Vocabulary**

**rakishly**

**unprofane**

**nonchalance**

**apparitions**

**abominations**

**servile**

**heinous**

**indignity**

**anachronism**

**anonymity**

**opulent**

**bourgeoisie**

**impudent**

**elocution**

- A.** In the appropriate areas provided below, list the problems you discovered have hurt or trapped Maya. Describe the problem, identifying whether it was a personal problem or a societal or historical problem. List the page # and copy the quote that explains the crisis.

**Personal/Family Problems**

**Page and Quotations**

**Societal Problems/Prejudices**

**Page and Quotations**

- B.** Describe the following people and explain how they affected Angelou.

Momma-

Bailey-

Uncle Willy-

Grandmother Baxter-

Mrs. Flowers-

Mrs. Cullinan-

Louise-

Henry Reed-

Mother-

Miss Kirwin-

Daddy-

**C.** Address the theme of hope. Choose five events in Angelou' life to show why she maintains hope even in the midst of pain.

**Reason for Hope**

**Pages and Quotations**

**A.** In the space below, list 5-10 things that happened in the book to show that Maya was growing up. Share the event and the text. Explain your choices when necessary.

**Grown up action and Explanation**

**Pages and Quotations**

**E.** Explain what you think will happen to Angelou after the end of the book. Why?

**F.** Journal Writing: “ I have felt like Maya did when...”

