

APPENDICES

Synopsis of I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

When Marguerite Johnson (Maya Angelou) was three years old and her brother, Bailey, was four, they were sent from their father in California to their paternal grandmother in Stamps, Arkansas. Their grandmother runs a store there, which is the center of life in the Negro community of the town. The depression hits Stamps, and leads to difficulty in making ends meet. Momma (Maya's grandma) is able to keep the store going through a system of trade. Christmas comes, and Maya and Bailey get presents from their parents from whom they have not heard for years. Maya and Bailey's father comes to Stamps the following year, and takes Maya and Bailey with him, which makes them feel wanted again.

But they soon find out that he is leaving them with a mother that they do not even know. Maya and Bailey live with their mother and their mother's boyfriend, Mr. Freeman. Mr. Freeman molests Maya one morning, and she is traumatized by the experience. He threatens to kill Bailey if she ever tells what happens. It scares Maya and turns her into a silent girl. Later, Mr. Freeman rapes her and Maya is both physically and emotionally crushed. Finally, Mr. Freeman is beaten to death by Maya's uncles. Since then, Maya becomes mute. Then, she and Bailey are sent back to Stamps.

One day, a graceful, proper woman named Mrs. Flowers invites Maya to her house to have a talk. Maya finally regains the will to speak, and feels very special at being noticed and taught by Mrs. Flowers. Then Maya has her graduation in school. Years later, Momma sends Maya and Bailey to their mother in San Francisco, because of the racial conflict in the south. Maya continues her school and has a step father, Daddy Clidell. One day Maya takes the train down to Southern California to spend the summer with her father, Daddy Bailey and her father's girlfriend, Dolores. But it turns out that the visit becomes a disaster. Dolores attacks Maya with scissors because she is jealous of Maya, who is close to Daddy Bailey. Maya runs away and spends a month to live in the junkyard before she finally comes home.

Maya decides that she has to get a job; she decides she can probably get a job on streetcars, and becomes obsessed with the idea. Maya visits a streetcar company office frequently, over a number of weeks, most times facing the same racist refusal. Finally, she is hired as the first black streetcar conductor in San Francisco.

One day Maya reads a book called *The Well of Loneliness* which tells about lesbianism and after that she begins to question about her sexual orientation. Afraid of becoming a lesbian, Maya decides to have a boyfriend and makes love to him. But a few weeks later, she finds out that she is pregnant. When she graduates from high school, her son is born. The novel ends by the time she begins her motherhood.

Biography of the Author

Maya Angelou, born April 4, 1928 as Marguerite Johnson in St. Louis, was raised in segregated rural Arkansas. She is a poet, historian, author, actress, playwright, civil-rights activist, producer and director. She lectures throughout the US and abroad and is Reynolds professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University in North Carolina since 1981. She has published ten best selling books and numerous magazine articles earning her Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award nominations. At the request of President Clinton, she wrote and delivered a poem at his 1993 presidential inauguration.

Dr. Angelou, who speaks French, Spanish, Italian and West African Fanti, began her career in drama and dance. She married a South African freedom fighter and lived in Cairo, where she was editor of *The Arab Observer*, the only English-language news weekly in the Middle East. In Ghana, she was a feature editor of *The African Review* and taught at the University of Ghana. In the 1960's, at the request of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Ms. Angelou became the northern coordinator for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Maya Angelou, poet, was among the first African-American women to hit the bestsellers lists with her *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sing*, held the Great Hall audience spellbound with stories of her own childhood. She ranged from story to poem to song and back again, and her theme was love and the universality of all lives. "The honorary duty of a human being is to love," Angelou said. She spoke of her early love for William Shakespeare's works, and offered her audience excerpts from the poems of several African-Americans, including James Weldon Johnson and Paul Lawrence Dunbar. But always, she came back to love - and

humanity. "I am human," Angelou said, quoting from her own work, "and nothing human can be alien to me."

In 1975 she received the Ladies Home Journal Woman of the Year Award in communications. She received numerous honorary degrees and was appointed by President Jimmy Carter to the National Commission on the Observance of International Woman's Year and by President Ford to the American Revolutionary Bicentennial Advisory Council. She is on the board of the American Film Institute and is one of the few female members of the Director's Guild. Maya Angelou is currently Reynolds Professor at Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, North Carolina.