



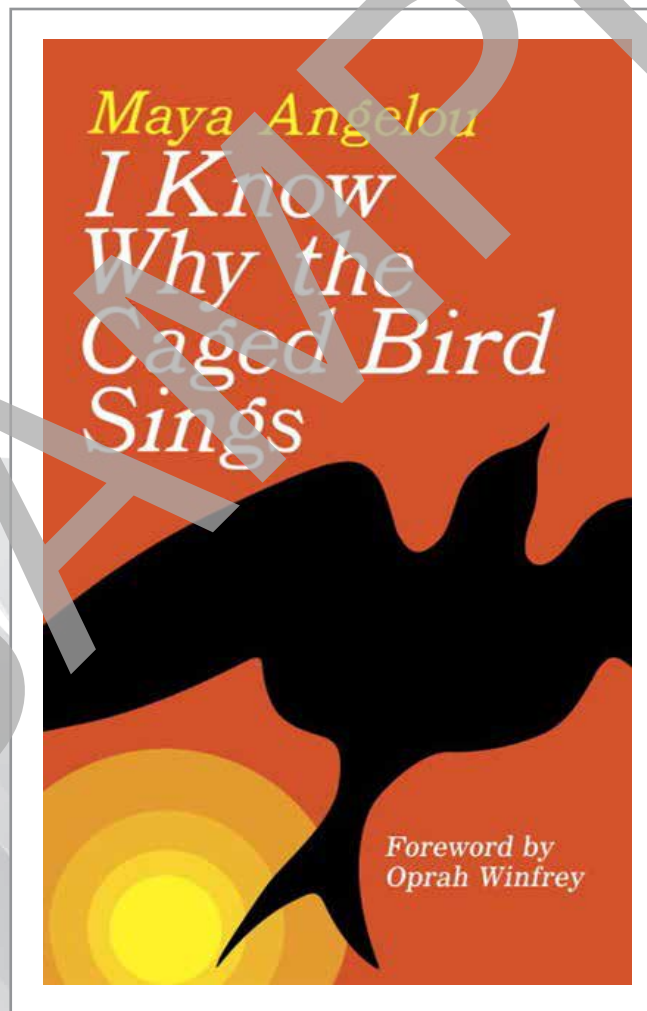
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

Maya Angelou



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

Maya Angelou

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Organization of the Book

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou, published in 1969, is an autobiography of the author's life from three to sixteen, about 1931 through 1945. A Black woman of intelligence, understanding, and poetic inspiration, she details her life in Stamps, Arkansas; St. Louis, Missouri; Los Angeles, California; and San Francisco, California. It's a richly experienced life with a series of differing parent figures. The book's language is clear, word choice often challenging and sometimes disarming. Major themes encountered in the book are prejudice, injustice, stereotypes, maturing, valuing, and growing up. The author chooses appealing significant experiences and details to include. The reader feels he or she has a good friend in Maya by the end of the book.

The language and incidents included suggest a mature secondary audience. Angelou shares her experience of rape by a household member as an eight-year-old (Chapter 12) and her loss of innocence in Chapter 35. She finishes the book (in Chapter 36) as an unwed sixteen-year-old mother.

Plot summaries, identified vocabulary words, and discussion questions are included herein chapter-by-chapter. Supplementary activities are provided throughout after each four chapters. Vocabulary activities are listed together on pages 4-6. It is suggested that part of each day's study be devoted to vocabulary.

About the Author

Maya Angelou was born on April 4, 1928, in St. Louis, Missouri, daughter of Bailey (a naval dietician) and Vivian (Baxter) Johnson. She has one son, Guy. She has been married and divorced twice. Her education was in public schools. She studied music privately, dance with Martha Graham, Pearl Primus, and Ann Halprin, and drama with Frank Silvera and Gene Frankel.

Ms. Angelou is an author, playwright, poet, singer, and stage and screen performer. She has performed world-wide and read her poetry at the Clinton inauguration in January, 1993.

Her writings include the following:

All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes
And Still I Rise
Gather Together in My Name
The Heart of a Woman

Using Character Webs—In the Novel Unit Approach

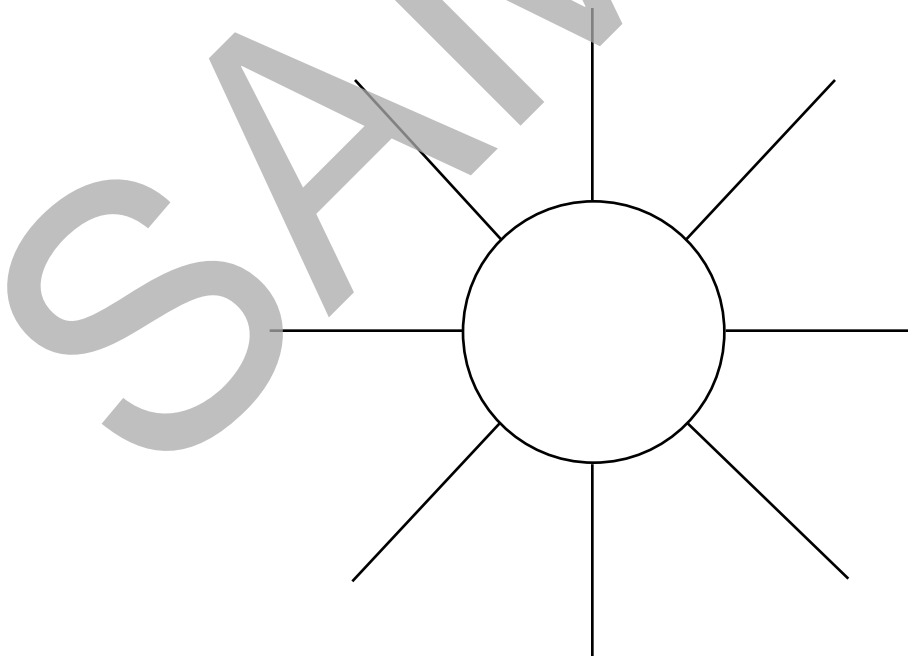
Attribute Webs are simply a visual representation of a character from the novel. They provide a systematic way for the students to organize and recap the information they have about a particular character. Attribute webs may be used after reading the novel to recapitulate information about a particular character or completed gradually as information unfolds, done individually, or finished as a group project.

One type of character attribute web uses these divisions:

- How a character acts and feels. (How does the character feel in this picture? How would you feel if this happened to you? How do you think the character feels?)
- How a character looks. (Close your eyes and picture the character. Describe him to me.)
- Where a character lives. (Where and when does the character live?)
- How others feel about the character. (How does another specific character feel about our character?)

In group discussion about the student attribute webs and specific characters, the teacher can ask for backup proof from the novel. You can also include inferential thinking.

Attribute webs need not be confined to characters. They may also be used to organize information about a concept, object or place.



Vocabulary:

obsession 12	exotic 12	affliction 13	sour dry mash 13
sloshed 13	concoctions 13	swill 14	rakishly 14
astraddle 14	nonchalance 14	abominations 14	squire 15
condoned 15	heinous 15		

Discussion Questions and Activities:

1. Why was pineapple almost sacred to the storyteller? (*Pineapple was a treat at Christmas, tasted good, and was available in the store.*)
2. Why did Uncle Willie hide? (*The white "boys" [the Klan?] were expected to seek revenge in the Black community because "a crazy nigger messed with a white lady."*)
3. What did Marguerite think of Mr. Steward? (*He was self-important, pompous, and condescending. He warned of the white "boys' " actions, but provided no real protection and condoned the actions.*) What do you think of Mr. Steward? Would such actions be allowed today?

Chapter 4—Pages 15-21

Plot Summary:

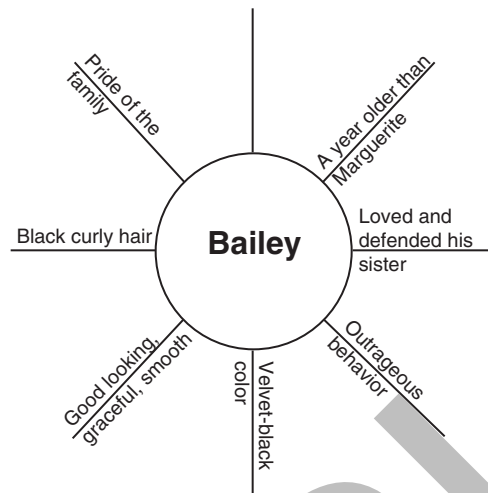
More detail on Bailey is given and the author explores the white part of town and whitefolks.

Vocabulary:

bogey men 15	disenchanted 16	chinaberry tree 16	anachronism 17
outrageous 18	weevils 18	preserved 19	collards 19
constrained 20	opulent 20		

Discussion Questions and Activities:

1. What is an anachronism? Who was the anachronism in Stamps? (*an independent Black man—Mr. McElroy who lived next door to the store*)
2. What has the author revealed of Bailey? (See top of next page for an example.)
3. How did Marguerite and Bailey approach the white part of town? (*fearfully as explorers walking without weapons into man-eating animals' territory*)
4. What did the author know of whites as a child? (*little direct knowledge, fear and distrust, not really believing that whites were real, knowledge of underclothes from laundry, small feet, walked on their heels*)



Supplementary Activities:

1. What is the author’s writing style? Give examples from the book to support your ideas. Consider these possible descriptions: lyrical, informal, contrast between extensive vocabulary in descriptions and the words spoken by the people, contrasts, disarming, blunt, straight-forward.
2. Identify the writers mentioned on page 11.
3. Start a listing of what Stamps, Arkansas taught Angelou.
4. The whitefolks aren’t “people” to Angelou. Can you know and understand people whom you don’t know personally? Why or why not?

Chapter 5—Pages 21-27

Plot Summary:

Three “powhitetrash” girls mock Momma, but she bests them in the end.

Vocabulary:

impudent 21	smirk 21	profanity 21	clabbered 21
gaggle 22	displaced 22	servile 22	aping 24
indignity 26			

Discussion Questions and Activities:

1. What were Momma’s two most important rules? (“*Thou shall not be dirty. Thou shall not be impudent.*”) Do you agree with the importance of the rules? What rules would you state as your parents’ commandments?