

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

*I Know Why the
Caged Bird Sings*

by Maya Angelou

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CHAPTER ONE

1. After agreeing to supervise the children, the train porter leaves Marguerite and Bailey alone on the train. Put yourself in Marguerite or Bailey's place. What are you thinking or feeling when the porter leaves?
2. Marguerite remembers the early mornings at the store and her grandmother's morning prayers. Can you remember a beautiful early morning scene you experienced? If you can, describe what the morning was like and how you felt about it.
3. The cotton workers have a difficult life. Have you witnessed or heard about a job that you think is a difficult or unpleasant way to make a living? What can you do to avoid working at such a job?

CHAPTER TWO

4. Momma makes a point of telling everyone she meets that Uncle Willie "wasn't born that way." Imagine you are Uncle Willie; describe how you feel hearing her explain this problem.
5. Uncle Willie hides his disability behind the counter and sometimes pretends to strangers that he isn't crippled. Assume you are Willie, and Marguerite asks you why you pretend like that. Write the answer you give her.

CHAPTER THREE

6. In Stamps, it is assumed that black people will go to heaven since they suffer here on earth. They endure their lives with the promise of an eternal reward. What are your thoughts or feelings on the idea that having a difficult time while alive assures a place in heaven?

Response Journal

7. The sheriff angers Marguerite. She does not think he deserves credit from God for trying to warn Willie of the possible trouble. Write a letter to God, from Marguerite, explaining why you are angry.

CHAPTER FOUR

8. The author mentions Mr. Elroy as an example of a successful black man. In your mind, what makes any man or woman a success? What plan would you follow to be that kind of success?
9. Bailey is Marguerite's hero. Is there a real person in your life you admire and want to be like? Relate the heroic qualities of this person.
10. The white people Marguerite encounters are almost like foreigners. She is interested in them and their strange lives. Assume you are visiting from China. What things might a visitor from China find strange about your life?

CHAPTER FIVE

11. It is insulting to Mrs. Henderson when the white people call her Annie. Can you think of a time when you or a friend felt deeply insulted? Describe how you felt.
12. Momma sings to herself whenever she faces a difficult situation. How do you feel about this as a way to handle a difficult situation?
13. Marguerite tells Momma she loves her and is proud of her by making a large heart in the dirt of the driveway. In what ways, other than words and physical expressions, have you seen someone show love to another person?

CHAPTER SIX

14. Because of his actions, the children are disgusted by the Reverend Thomas. Write a letter of advice from the children to Reverend Thomas on how to behave when he is a guest in another person's home.
15. Sister Monroe behaves outrageously because she wants everyone to be impressed with her devotion. Tell about someone you know who tries to impress others through behavior.
16. Marguerite and Bailey begin to laugh in church. Have you ever felt the urge to laugh in an inappropriate situation? Describe what happened.

CHAPTER SEVEN

17. Momma tries to teach the children how to deal safely with white folks. As a parent, what advice would you give your children about dealing with other people who are different?

CHAPTER EIGHT

18. In Marguerite's world, when blacks give to blacks, it is a "true gift" because the item is needed by both. Write about a "true gift" you have received or witnessed another receive.
19. Bailey and Marguerite are upset by the Christmas gifts from their parents. Write a note from Marguerite to her mother telling her exactly how she felt about receiving the gifts.
20. Bailey hopes his mother will come to see them. He wants her in his life. Assume you have a friend who is separated from his mother at the holidays. What advice would you give him or her?

CHAPTER NINE

21. The children leave their home in Stamps to travel with their father to St. Louis. There they will be staying with their mother. Write about a time in your life when you moved to a different place. What was the best or worst thing about the move?
22. Marguerite is confused and amazed by the behavior of her parents and the way in which their personalities differ from hers. Are there things about your parents' personalities that amaze you? Explain what these things are and why they surprise you.
23. Daddy Bailey tries to talk to Marguerite and make friends with her but is not really successful. Write a letter from Daddy Bailey to Marguerite expressing how he feels when she doesn't respond to his efforts.

CHAPTER TEN

24. Uncle Tommy tells Marguerite, "Don't worry cause you ain't pretty. Plenty pretty women I seen digging ditches or worse. You smart. I swear to God, I rather you have a good mind than a cute behind." What is your reaction to Uncle Tommy's comment?
25. Marguerite says, "But what mother and daughter understand each other, or even have the sympathy for each other's lack of understanding?" Write about a time in your life when your mother didn't understand you. How did you try to help her understand your point of view?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

26. Marguerite experiences sexual abuse by Mr. Freeman. If this were to happen to one of your friends, how would you provide comfort? What advice would you give?

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27. Some people say that if you never had the experience you can't give advice; others say it is frequently the outside observer who can give the best advice. What is your opinion on giving advice?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

28. In the trial of Mr. Freeman, Marguerite lies on the witness stand. Assume she keeps a daily diary and write her entry for that day, describing how she feels about lying.
29. If you understand why Marguerite stopped talking, explain it to a friend who doesn't understand Marguerite's behavior.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

30. Marguerite learns from the people in Stamps to "be satisfied with life's inequities." For example, she learns to accept the unfairness of the rape. What do you suppose are inequities in life that you have learned or must learn to accept if you are to be happy?
31. Marguerite is described by the community as "tender-hearted" or sensitive. Do you know someone who is "tender hearted?" Are they understood or misunderstood by others?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

32. Write a letter to Mrs. Flowers from a grown-up Marguerite expressing why she admired Mrs. Flowers and how the woman helped shape her life.