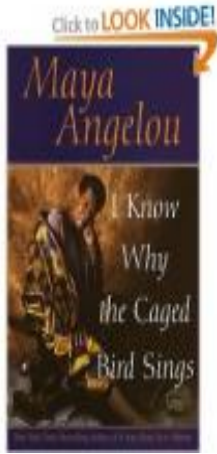


# I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

by Maya Angelou

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## About the Book

Sent by their mother to live with their devout, self-sufficient grandmother in a small Southern town, Maya and her brother, Bailey, endure the ache of abandonment and the prejudice of the local "powhitetrash." At eight years old and back at her mother's side in St. Louis, Maya is attacked by a man many times her age --- and has to live with the consequences for a lifetime. Years later, in San Francisco, Maya learns about love for herself and the kindness of others, her own strong spirit, and the ideas of great authors ("I met and fell in love with William Shakespeare") will allow her to be free instead of imprisoned.

Poetic and powerful, *I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS* is a modern American classic that will touch hearts and change minds for as long as people read.

## Discussion Guide

1. The memoir opens with a provocative refrain: "What you looking at me for? I didn't come to stay ... "

What do you think this passage says about Ritie's sense of herself? How does she feel about her place in the world? How does she keep her identity intact?

2. Upon seeing her mother for the first time after years of separation, Ritie describes her as "a hurricane in its perfect power." What do you think about Ritie's relationship with her mother? How does it compare to her relationship with her grandmother, "Momma"?

3. The author writes, "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." What do you make of the author's portrayal of race? How do Ritie and her family cope with the racial tension that permeates their lives?
4. Throughout the book, Ritie struggles with feelings that she is "bad" and "sinful," as her thoughts echo the admonitions of her strict religious upbringing. What does she learn at the end of the memoir about right and wrong?
5. What is the significance of the title as it relates to Ritie's self-imposed muteness?

## Author Bio

Poet, writer, performer, teacher and director Maya Angelou was raised in Stamps, Arkansas, and then moved to San Francisco. In addition to her bestselling autobiographies, beginning with *I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS*, she also wrote a cookbook, *HALLELUJAH! THE WELCOME TABLE*, and five poetry collections, including *I SHALL NOT BE MOVED* and *SHAKER, WHY DON'T YOU SING?* She passed away on May 28, 2014 at the age of 86.

## Critical Praise

"More than a tour de force of language or the story of childhood suffering: it quietly and gracefully portrays and pays tribute to the courage, dignity and endurance of the small, rural community in which she spent most of her early years in the 1930's....Some of the incidents she depicts are wonderfully funny. But a summary of the incidents cannot do this book justice; one has to read it to appreciate its sensitivity and life."

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## **I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings**

by Maya Angelou

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