

# Maya Angelou as a Caged Bird

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## Maya Angelou as a Caged Bird

The graduation scene from *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* illustrates how, living in the midst of racism and unequal access to opportunity, Maya Angelou was able to surmount the obstacles that stood in her way of intellectual develop and find "higher ground." One of the largest factors responsible for [Angelou's](#) academic success was her dedication to and capacity for hard work, "My work alone has awarded me a top place...No absences, no tardinesses, and my academic work was among the best of the year" (Angelou 13-14). Angelou worked hard and read a great deal in order to be able to perform on such a level, in spite of the fact that she had much less access (or none) to the quality of teachers, school environment and other resources available to whites because of her color.

Another way Angelou surmounted the disadvantages of being black in a racist white controlled school district was to view her brother as a role model. She is proud that she can recite the preamble to the Constitution faster than Bailey, she is proud he will see her graduate at the top of her class, and he provides her with literature which fuels her desire to read. [Maya](#) also used other students in her class who were intelligent as role models and a measure stick of her own performance. She admires the class valedictorian, Henry

Reed, because he has been her most challenging academic competition among her peers. However, another reason Angelou is able to overcome obstacles and reach higher ground is that she is not jealous or mean-spirited about academically competing with others. Instead, she is happy that others are developing towards higher ground. As she says about Henry, "I had admired him for years because e...

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...race" (Angelou 21). Angelou knows she would let down all those who have struggled and given her encouragement if she did not rise above the limitations of her own time and place.

#### WORK CITED

Angelou, M. I Know Why The [Caged](#) Bird Sings. In Eastman, A. M. The Norton Anthology of Expository Prose. (3rd edit.) W.W. Norton & Co., NY: 1973.

The student may wish to begin the paper with the following quote:

I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings liberates the reader into life simply because Maya Angelou confronts her own life with such moving wonder, such a luminous dignity. I have no words for this achievement, but I know that not since the days of my childhood, when the people in books were more real than the people one saw every day, have I found myself so moved. Her portrait is a Biblical study of life in the midst of death. James Baldwin

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