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## Highlighting symbolism in Maya Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this paper is to explain the strong presence of symbols in I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou. In literary works, a symbol is employed to bring out ideas, conceptions, beliefs, and opinions in a more efficient method. Symbolism allows for a multi-dimensional approach to literary writings, allowing readers to grasp the substance of the texts with more clarity. Symbolism is a highly illustrative form of communication that reveals the ultimate truth. The desired meanings are indirectly conveyed through signs and symbols. The goal of symbolism is to achieve a far more profound and significant understanding. Rather than speaking it out loud, an author can employ symbols to convey her views.*

**Keywords:** Symbolism, Caged bird, Momma's Store, Arkansas, Self-acceptance, African-American

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Maya Angelou's incredible life is not only a source of fascination that will go down in history, but it is also a beacon of hope and a depiction of life that emerges from mortality. It also sends a powerful message to women of all ages worldwide, particularly in African-American society. Maya Angelou's fiction and poetry are full of hope and optimism, depicting life as a young black girl thriving in a predominantly white American society. These pieces also highlight her self-discovery challenges and how she was always labelled a black woman before being recognized as an artist and writer. In addition to being a significant contribution to American literature, her writings serve as a guideline for women, inspiring, motivating, instructing, and regulating every marginalized group and oppressed woman to have a positive attitude on life. Her works also teach women how to persevere in the face of adversity and transform it into a bigger spirit to empower themselves. Her life, in addition to her literary works, is a model of patience and positivity.

#### 1.1 Maya's Easter Outfit

Maya's lack of self-love and yearning for acceptance through transformation symbolizes the lavender taffeta outfit Momma

fixes for Easter. She thinks white beauty to be the epitome of beauty. The outfit looks incredible hanging by the sewing machine. Maya believes the garment would show her genuine personality to others, who will be stunned by her beauty. On Easter morning, however, she has confronted with the harsh realization that the garment is nothing more than a white woman's discard, incapable of waking her from her terrible nightmare. Maya realizes that she will have to transform herself from the inside out.

#### 1.2 The Shop

Maya's childhood was spent at Momma's Store, an important gathering spot in Stamps. She observes the cycles of nature and works there, caring for plantation owners and canners during the cotton-picking season and the slaughtering season, respectively. Maya recalls that the Store was her favourite place until she left Arkansas for good at thirteen. It represents the value of a strong and faithful community and the rewards of hard effort and commitment.

#### 1.3 The train

The train is a metaphor for transition. When Bailey and Marguerite are separated from their parents, they take the train alone, their ticket attached to Bailey's coat. They take the train to and from St. Louis once more, and then again on their journey to California after Bailey is threatened and Momma orders them to leave. Angelou spends a lot of time thinking about these train excursions and how they make her feel sad, fearful, and yearning. These train travels remind her that she does not have access to a home in America as others as a young Black girl.

#### 1.4 Doll

Another symbol is a doll that arrives as a Christmas gift from Angelou's mother, who has abandoned her. Because the doll is white, has blue eyes, rosy cheeks, and yellow hair. Maya struggles with the thought that beauty equates to being white once more. As a result, she is confronted with yet another example of unreachable beauty. The doll, however, also represents abandonment. Angelou had assumed her parents had died up to that point. However, the doll serves as a bitter

reminder of how they left Angelou's life. Maya and her brother were fond of Christmas gifts, one fine day they received gifts from their mother and father." One Christmas, we received gifts from our mother and father, who lived apart in a heaven called California, where we were informed they could have whatever they wanted" (CB 56)

### **1.5 Suit of the streetcar Conductor**

The streetcar conductor's blue clothing symbolizes Maya's self-acceptance. It denotes that she can identify a role in society, seek it, and accomplish it. It also symbolizes her pride in her African-American heritage and her willingness to fight for her rights.

Maya frequently refers to herself as a "caged bird" throughout the narrative. She referred to herself as the caged bird because she saw herself as a caged bird as a mature but insecure black girl growing up in the South in the 1930s. Fear, insecurities, racism, inequality, and sexism kept her confined, and she yearned to be free of them, hence the caged bird metaphor.

### **1.6 Joe Louis**

A well-known American boxer, Joe Louis was one of the first African-American athletes to be regarded as a national hero in the United States. A gathering of Stamp's Black residents gathers at Momma's Store to listen to a game of Louis over the radio in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. As they watch the match, it becomes evident that Louis represents Black Americans as a whole for these people. "It was our people falling," Angelou writes when he begins to lose a little. Another Black man was also hanged from a tree in a lynching. Another woman has been raped in an ambush Joe Louis proved that African-Americans were the strongest people when he won the match.

### **1.7 San Francisco is a city in California**

Maya has a profound and "impartial" fondness for San Francisco, which she believes "arrogantly" no one else can

match. San Francisco represents "a state of beauty" and "a state of freedom" to Maya. Because she feels liberated in San Francisco in a manner, she never did in rural Arkansas. Because segregation is not as strictly enforced or fostered in California, the pressures of racism and white supremacy are not as intense in San Francisco as they are in Stamps. Racism exists in San Francisco, as evidenced by Maya's fight to become the city's first Black streetcar conductor. Maya's ability to get this position, which she had never been able to get before, is a different story.

## **2. CONCLUSION**

The author has used symbols to enhance the novel, effectively conveying her thoughts artistically. Symbols are manifestations of ideas and traits that provide meaning to the writer's imagination in literature. To fully appreciate the significance of symbols in a book, one must go deeply into the meaning of those symbols. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, an autobiography, largely is packed with rich symbols and imagery, and this paper delves into Maya Angelou's use of symbols in this work.

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