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Response Journal

Reflections: A Student Response Journal



*I Know Why the
Caged Bird Sings*
Maya Angelou



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Response Journal

To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

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?

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 TWENTY-SIX

57. When in the car with their mother, Marguerite and Bailey realize that their mother is nervous around them and that they have the power to upset her. What kind of power do you have over your parents? Do you use your power fairly or unfairly?
58. The children's mother shoots her partner because he calls her a name. The author tells about this incident as a way of explaining Momma's attitude. The story doesn't include any information about what the police do or if she is punished. Speculate on what happened and how she avoided jail time.
59. Marguerite and Bailey are introduced to different cultures by going to different restaurants and tasting their food. We have all had the experience of being served something strange at someone's house or in a restaurant. Relate a time when you were served something unusual.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

60. Miss Kirwin is Marguerite's favorite teacher. What qualities does the ideal teacher or your favorite teacher possess?

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

61. Marguerite is exposed to colorful characters who tell her tales of their adventures. Can you think of a story told to you by an older relative or acquaintance that was interesting, but may not have been true?
62. Marguerite lives in two worlds. She knows how to speak the school language and then slip into the colloquial slang around the neighborhood. If you or someone you know does this, explain to someone who doesn't understand why having two languages is necessary.

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70. What advice would you give to a friend who is planning to run away?

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

71. Marguerite stays with the homeless children for a month. Speculate on what her father is doing all of that time.
72. Why do you think Marguerite's mother doesn't ask more questions about her daughter's lack of luggage?

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

73. When Marguerite goes to visit Bailey, she discovers he has already made up with their mother. Write a dialogue between Bailey and his mother in which they both decide it is best for him to get a job on the railroad.
74. Bailey's mother comes through for him and helps him get a job. She doesn't hold a grudge about the fight. Write about a time in your life when you had a fight with a friend or family member. How did you resolve your differences?

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

75. When Marguerite sets out to get "an impossible job" as a conductor on the street cars, her mother encourages her to try. Do you feel that your parents encourage you to try new or difficult things?
76. Through persistence, Marguerite eventually gets her job. However, the hours are difficult, and the job doesn't live up to her expectations. Can you remember a time when something you wanted desperately didn't live up to your expectations, once it was obtained?