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Sample

Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



I Know Why the
Caged Bird Sings

by Maya Angelou

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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 **Prestwick House**

P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938
www.prestwickhouse.com
800.932.4593

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Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. point out examples in this novel of segregation and the oppression of the Black community during the 1930's and 1940's.
2. find examples of metaphors and similes to illustrate the author's poetic writing style.
3. recognize and point out examples of the following literary elements in the novel:
 - flashback
 - foreshadowing
 - symbolism
4. discuss the author's use of allusion, and explain how it enhances the reader's understanding of the children's dreams for their futures.
5. discuss the symbolic significance of the title and explain how it relates to the major theme of the book.
6. contrast the Black people's definition of charity with the White people's definition.
7. trace the importance of religion in the Black community and the idea that God favors the oppressed.
8. discuss the Black people's definition of respect and the importance attached to the proper form of address.
9. explain how the sexual assault of young Marguerite impacts her childhood, her later adult life, and the lives of her family members.
10. draw a generalization about the Black females in Marguerite's life and support the generalization by citing incidents from the book.
11. cite events in the book to support the following thematic generalization:

People who want to do the right thing, will do the right thing.
12. demonstrate and support, by referring to events and comments from the book, that a major theme in this book is:

Despite the strictures imposed and the lack of power, with hope in the heart, one can survive and possibly thrive.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. How was Stamps segregated from the neighboring White community? List three examples of White oppression Marguerite observed from the relative safety of the Store.
2. *About the Author* states that Maya Angelou has written five collections of poetry. Find specific examples of poetic elements, such as imagery, metaphors, and similes, in this novel. How does her use of language affect the readability of the book?
3. Support the following statement with examples from the story: The title of the book is a metaphor for the invincibility of the human spirit under oppression.
4. Discuss “respect” from the Black perspective, specifically, respect for elders, a person’s correct name, and God.
5. Trace how Marguerite comes to terms with the sexual assault and is able to go on with her life.
6. What does Marguerite learn about death from her flashback to Florida Taylor’s funeral?
7. Why do you think the author mentions the race of her grandmother? How did her grandmother’s heritage impact her mother’s life?
8. At the end of the book, Marguerite learns to care for her infant son. She instinctively protects her son because she wants to do the right thing for him. Find other events in the story where characters do the right thing for someone else because they want to do it.
9. What does the allusion to Deuteronomy tell the reader about the author’s views about religion?
10. Discuss the positive and negative roles of religion in the author’s life.
11. Using Angelou’s definition of “White charity,” discuss the pros and cons of give-away programs for the poor.
12. Draw a conclusion about the Black female figures in the narrator’s life and support any generalizations by referring to incidents or comments in the book.
13. Provide support from the book for the following statement: In this coming-of-age narrative, the central figure moves from self-hate to self-love and from a fragmented personality to a whole one.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

Prologue

VOCABULARY

persimmon – orange-colored fruit
taffeta – stiff and shiny fabric

1. Why can Marguerite not remember the poem?

2. Find a simile in this chapter.

3. Describe how Marguerite looks in her dreams, and then describe how she sees her real self.

4. Why does Marguerite laugh after wetting her pants?

5. What do you suppose the author means in the following statement? Put into your own words the point of the observation, and note whether you agree or disagree with it.

“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. It is an unnecessary insult.”

5. Who is Sister Monroe, and what does she do to disrupt Reverend Taylor's sermon?

6. Why does Reverend Taylor preach about the Pharisees the following Sunday?

7. What causes Marguerite and Bailey to laugh in church?

8. The story about Sister Monroe is an example of what literary term?

Chapter 16

VOCABULARY

barrenness – incapable of having children
debutante – a young woman making her first entrance into society

1. What Victorian skill are Negro girls taught in Stamps?

2. Why does Marguerite work extra hours for Mrs. Cullinan?

3. Why does Marguerite go home sick from Mrs. Cullinan’s house?

4. Why does Marguerite decide to keep her job, and how does Bailey help her lose it?

5. Why do the Black people in the story consider it insulting to be called by anything other than their proper name?

Chapter 27

VOCABULARY

abetted – supported
desiccated – dried up
marauding – roaming about with the intent to pillage and or raid

1. Why is the Black population insensitive to the plight of the Japanese Americans?

2. How does Marguerite feel about living in San Francisco during this time?

3. What are the “Pride” and the “Prejudice” which make up San Francisco?

4. What is the mood of this chapter? Why?
