
Maya Angelou: The Woman With Endless Heart

“If you don’t like something, change it. If you can’t change it, change your attitude”. Maya truly lived by this quote. Despite the challenges during her childhood, she still rose above and took control over the life she wanted to live. Her bravery and desire to make a difference is what make her poetry so impactful. Marguerite Annie Johnson was born on April 4, 1928, in St. Louis, Missouri. She was a poet, civil rights activist, and award-winning author. Maya Angelou is one of America's most accomplished authors despite her traumatic childhood; she faced rape and racial oppression and used them as inspiration for her award-winning poetry.

Maya Angelou did not have a great childhood. She faced many trials that shaped her into the person she was. At eight years old, she was raped by her mother’s boyfriend. She was afraid to tell anyone because she was told if she did, her brother would be killed. The rapist’s trial and death by beating (possibly by her uncles) was perceived by Maya to be her fault. Because of this experience, she quit talking for years (Thursby). Maya felt like it was her fault her mother’s boyfriend was killed because she had revealed his name. No matter what he did to her, she felt like it was her responsibility to carry the guilt. This was a very impactful situation in Maya’s childhood, especially since she was so young. In addition, when Maya Angelou was very young, her parents got divorced. She and her brother were sent to Arkansas to live with their father’s mother, Anne Henderson. Being an African American, Maya experienced racial prejudices and discrimination while living there. As a little girl, this was very discouraging. Not only was she in a new environment, but Maya also had to learn how to face these problems. The imprint often years of living in Stamps with her grandmother and her uncle Willie Johnson formed the basis for Angelou's first and best-known autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, which chronicles her first 16 years (Thursby).

Maya has a very graceful writing style. Her poetry speaks about her unfortunate childhood and issues that she has faced in the past, but it does not tear down the mood. Her view displayed in her poetry is inspiring and hopeful. Several pieces of Maya Angelou’s work talk about her childhood. “*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*” is written about her childhood and young adult years. She has a memoir titled “*Mom & Me & Mom*” where she speaks about her complicated relationship with her mother, who abandoned Maya during her childhood. Maya would have been a completely different person without the childhood that she had. Her poetry style would have been different or she may not have even been led to write poetry. Part of what makes her poetry so impactful is her story making the readers feel like they are a part of it and have empathy towards her situations. Although the trials Maya Angelou faced as a child were unfortunate, they shaped her into the writer she was. She incorporated many stories about her childhood into her work, hoping to bring awareness and inspiration to others. Maya Angelou uses alliteration, rhyming, and short lines in her poetry often. Most of her poems are easy to understand and include pathos to make the readers put themselves in her shoes.

Angelou directed national attention to humanitarian concerns with her poem “*On the Pulse of the Morning*,” which she recited at the 1993 inauguration of President Bill Clinton. In this poem, Angelou calls for recognition of the human failings pervading American history and a renewed national commitment to unity and social improvement”. Maya Angelou’s poetry became so well known, the President decided to have her read her poetry at his inauguration. Although her

popularity grew and grew, she remained humble. President Barack Obama issued a statement about Angelou, saying she was 'a brilliant writer, a fierce friend, and a truly phenomenal woman.' He states she had the ability to remind us that we are all God's children; that we all have something to offer. Maya's poetry touched so many lives, even the President's.

In conclusion, Maya and her poetry touched the souls of many people. She was a living example for no matter what happens, you are in control of your actions and can rise above anything. Maya Angelou said, "You are the sum total of everything you've ever seen, heard, eaten, smelled, been told, forgot – it's all there. Everything influences each of us, and because of that, I try to make sure that my experiences are positive". This quote sums up her poetry and life story. No matter what life's circumstances are, everyone has the ability to overcome them and use it as fuel for inspiration.