

Maya Angelou: Phenomenal Woman



1928 – 2014

*"If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude."
- Maya Angelou*

"When the SUN rises, I am the time. When the children sing I am the rhyme."

"I believe all things are possible for a human being, and I don't think there isn't anything in the world I can't do."

She was a Cable Car conductor, playwright, novelist, teacher, editor, newspaper writer, waitress, professional dancer, actress, confidant of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, organizer for the Civil Rights movement, teen mom, and high school dropout. During her life, Maya Angelou did it all. In an age where civil disruption and anger spilled out into the streets of the U.S., she chose to be a voice of compassion and hope.

As a child growing up in Stamps, Arkansas, she was raised by her grandmother. Always dreaming of getting away and seeing exotic places, and doing great things, her travels took her to places such as Egypt and Ghana. She met and befriended influential people, such as MLK and Malcolm X, and later became a role model and mentor to people such as Oprah Winfrey.

Angelou began her writing career in the late 1950's as a way of expressing the emotions and feelings that had been building inside of her since her troubled childhood. Starting with autobiographies, telling about her struggles, she then turned to poetry as an avenue for her thoughts and feelings. She would eventually be nominated for both the Pulitzer Prize for writing as well as the National Book Award. In 1993, she was asked to recite her poem "On the Pulse of Morning" at the inauguration of President Bill Clinton. At the time, she was only the second poet ever invited to do this (Robert Frost was the first, in 1961, for John F. Kennedy).

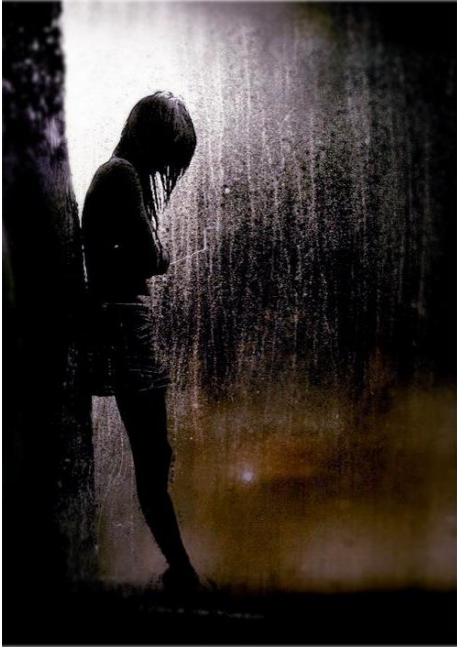
When Angelou died in 2014, she was widely regarded as one of America's most well-known and well-liked poets.

"All my work, my life, everything I do is about survival, not just bare, awful, plodding survival, but survival with grace and faith. While one may encounter many defeats, one must not be defeated."

Q: What does Angelou mean by the above quote? How does it reflect her personality? How can you relate to this?



"I am a human being. Nothing can be alien to me."



Alone 1975

Lying, thinking
 Last night
 How to find my soul a home
 Where water is not thirsty
 And bread loaf is not stone
 I came up with one thing
 And I don't believe I'm wrong
 That nobody,
 But nobody
 Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
 Nobody, but nobody
 Can make it out here alone.

There are some millionaires
 With money they can't use
 Their wives run round like banshees
 Their children sing the blues
 They've got expensive doctors
 To cure their hearts of stone.
 But nobody

No nobody
 Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
 Nobody, but nobody
 Can make it out here alone.

Now if you listen closely
 I'll tell you what I know
 Storm clouds are gathering
 The wind is gonna blow
 The race of man is suffering
 And I can hear the moan,
 Cause nobody,
 But nobody
 Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
 Nobody, but nobody
 Can make it out here alone.

Woman Work 1978

I've got the children to tend
 The clothes to mend
 The floor to mop'
 The food to shop
 Then the chicken to fry
 The baby to dry
 I got company to feed
 The garden to weed
 I've got the shirts to press
 The tots to dress
 The cane to be cut
 I gotta clean up this hut
 Then see about the sick
 And the cotton to pick.

Shine on me, sunshine
 Rain on me, rain
 Fall softly, dewdrops
 And cool my brow again.

Storm, blow me from here
 With your fiercest wind
 Let me float across the sky
 'Til I can rest again.

Fall gently, snowflakes
 Cover me with white
 Cold icy kisses and
 Let me rest tonight.

Sun, rain, curving sky
 Mountain, oceans, leaf and stone
 Star shine, moon glow
 You're all that I can call my own.

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."



Sounds like Pearls

Sounds

Like pearls
 Roll off your tongue
 To grace this eager ebon ear.

Doubt and fear,
 Ungainly things
 With blushings
 Disappear.

(1971)



From “On the Pulse of Morning”

You, who gave me my first name, you
Pawnee, Apache and Seneca, you
Cherokee Nation, who rested with me,
then
Forced on bloody feet, left me to the
employment of other seekers – desperate
for gain,
Starving for gold.
You, the Turk, the Swede, the German, the
Scot...
You the Ashanti, the Yoruba, the Kru,
bought
Sold, stolen, arriving on a nightmare
Praying for a dream.
Here, root yourselves beside me.
I am the Tree planted by the River,
Which will not be moved.
I, the Rock, I the River, I the Tree
I am yours – your Passages have been paid.
Lift up your faces, you have a piercing need
For this bright morning dawning for you.
History, despite its wrenching pain,
Cannot be unlived, and if faced
With courage, need not be lived again.
Lift up your eyes upon
The day breaking for you.
Give birth again
To the dream. (1993)

Caged Bird

The free bird leaps
On the back of the wind
And floats downstream
Till the current ends
And dips his wings
In the orange sun rays
And dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks
Down his narrow cage
Can seldom see through
His bars of rage
His wings are clipped and
His feet are tied
So he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
With fearful trill
Of the things unknown
But longed for still
And his tune is heard
On the distant hill
For the caged bird
Sings of freedom

The free bird thinks of another breeze
And the trade winds soft through the sighing trees
And the fat worms waiting on a dawn-bright lawn
And he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
His shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
His wings are clipped and his feet are tied
So he opens his throat to sing

The caged bird sings
With a fearful trill
Of things unknown
But longed for still
And his tune is heard
On the distant hill
For the caged bird
Sings of freedom.

(1969)

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*For the
Caged bird
Sings of
Freedom*
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