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NEW POST

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Posted on 15 October 2017 By Maya Angelou

Maya Angelou was a poet and Nobel laureate who once gave an address at President Clinton's inauguration. Before she won her multitudes of awards and honors, Maya was raised in rural Stamps, Arkansas by her grandmother and uncle during the depression. First published in 1969 and now considered a modern classic, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* details Angelou's tumultuous childhood in poignant detail. Born Marguerite Johnson and often called Ritie, Maya and her older brother Bailey were taken to live with their grandmother at young ages following their parents' divorce. Even though the south was still in the throes of Jim Crow and Stamps was at the forefront of segregation, young Maya appeared to enjoy a loving childhood. Raised by a strict, church-going grandmother and uncle, Maya and Bailey turned to both books and each other for comfort. Devouring books like candy, both children quickly advanced through the Stamps educational system, two grades ahead of schedule. When Maya was eight and Bailey nine, their father came to Arkansas and brought them to live with their mother in St. Louis. Coming from a multi-racial family, members of Maya's maternal family were light-skinned enough to pass for white and some integrated into the German community. It was in St. Louis, a city that should have afforded Maya opportunities than rural Stamps, that she experienced the low point in her childhood. Physically abused by her mother's fiancé, Maya recovered and returned to Stamps and a loving environment. She and Bailey continued to live with their grandmother until they had advanced beyond what the

education system offered them in the segregated south. With no future other than a house servant or cotton picker, the two were returned to their mother, now living in desegregated California. While in California, Maya experienced highs and lows as well as Jim Crow rearing its ugly head, the low point of which was living in a car in a junk yard for a month. These experiences, including being reunited with both parents and establishing relationships with them, made for events that Maya could reflect on later in life. In this volume I find it extraordinary that Maya could overcome being abused as a young child and still manage to graduate school two years ahead of schedule at a high academic level. This is a testament to her grandmother as well as her personal fabric. This fabric led her to be the first colored streetcar operator in San Francisco and later on the poet laureate that people recognize to this day. Maya Angelou noted her writing influences as Langston Hughes, Paul Laurence Dunbar, as well as Booker T. Washington who encouraged a generation of African Americans to achieve employment through a stellar education. In her dedication, Angelou also cites her parents as being positive influences in her life after they reconciled. A gifted author and poet who was advanced well beyond her years as a child, Maya graced us with her powerful prose in all of her works of literature. A poignant look into a childhood in the Jim Crow, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* reveals the upbringing of a remarkable American woman. A courageous glimpse into Angelou's life, this first memoir of hers easily merits 5 bright stars. Even before I started listening to this audio book, I could hear Angelou's voice, deep and distinctive. I remember seeing her on tv at some point in the past and notably, even though a while ago, when she read a poem she had written for President Clinton's inauguration. This autobiography of her early years from age four through sixteen makes for a tough story at times, but an amazing telling of it. At four years old, she and her brother Bailey are sent to Stamps, Arkansas to live with their paternal grandmother, a staunchly religious and savvy store owner and their disabled Uncle Willy. They help at the store, go to school and live through times of ugly racism. Four years later they go to live with their mother and at eight years old Maya is raped by her mother's boyfriend. The children return to live with their grandmother, but Maya is

so scarred by the attack that she stops speaking for several years Yet, amid the bad times in this depiction of the Jim Crow south, there are times of happiness and revelation of what life has to offer It is back in Stamps that she develops a love of reading and she calls Shakespeare her first white love She shares the joy of making her first friend and her unconditional love for her brother Bailey The descriptions of the revival meeting and the church picnic and the days at her grandmother s store are poetic and she took me there with her wonderful story telling A few years later, they move back with their mother and it is here in California that we see the impact of the past on her and also see her come of age at sixteen, on her journey to becoming the renown activist, writer, poet Angelou does nothing short of bare her heart and soul in this deeply personal and affecting narrative. I really enjoyed this book It was required reading for a University course I took on Adolescent Literature. This book has been placed on banned book lists by needlessly close minded people for it s real life content. The book tastefully addresses issues of molestation, rape, racism But it does so within the context of the trials and tribulations of growing up as well The book presents things in a direct and extremely vivid fashion, but it is not garishly or needlessly graphic These are issues that need to be addressed and talked about with adolescents In fact, earlier generations could have likely benefited from a little open discussion about such matters. In any regard, the book is not about these issues, it simply addresses them within the context, which is Maya Angelou s early life from somewhere around age 6 up to about 17 or 18 I believe Worth reading, worth having your kids read Just be sure to discuss it s content with them like a parent should anyway. My mother could never really speak to me about the abuse she suffered as a little girl the closest we came to talking about her experiences occurred when we read this painful and important book together I imagine that Maya s book has allowed countless women who have suffered similar horrors an opportunity to know they will never be alone in their pain And perhaps, like my mother, an opportunity to begin to heal by sharing their story with a loved one. RIP, Maya Your words have made this planet a better place If only the rest of us could be half as decent as you. I was sitting on a bench as I enjoyed the last bits of warm

sunlight the dying summer was oozing out, scrutinizing a newspaper while calculatedly assuming a thoughtful gaze This little girl ran up to me She said Mister, mister, I know why the caged bird sings I looked up from reading the financial news That s great kid Now run along, can t you see I m busy I turned back to reading on how poorly the economy was doing There s nothing like reading bad news to feed the intellect But mister, mister, the caged bird sings and I know why I know why, la di da, la di doo, and so should you She skipped and danced excitedly A bunch of people were standing around, bestowing benign smiles on the girl and throwing eager looks in my direction as an emphatic plea to hear her out I heaved a sigh, put down the paper and said Alright little one, tell me all about that bird of yours So she started talking About her grandmother Momma, how strong she was, about her momma Mother Dear, such a beautiful lady, about handsome and kind Brother Bailey and big and absent Father Bailey, about her little life in a little corner of a little shop The corner, despite its size, offers the perfect vantage point to see what goes on in that big world and in the little minds that inhabit it She tells excitedly of her sweet childhood memories and shares her keen observations She offers an insider s view on a part of the world, a part of society, I was completely unfamiliar with I d heard about cotton pickers, of course I saw them depicted in popular culture But what I saw through her tales were not mere depictions but real life people, worn out by the burdens of their tasks I saw their fatigue through the small spasms of pain surrounding their lips and quavering shoulders, the absence of the glint in their eyes as they were telling their jokes But even as I looked into this unknown world many of it felt familiar to me and I realised that this unknown world is my world, our world, only there s this wall Who put that stupid thing there The little girl showed me the window in that wall and her generous spirit has left it wide open as the breeze of her story wafted through it.I willed her to keep talking and she did, with passion and patience Suddenly the girl stopped dancing Looking down at the ground she said, with a voice as tiny as a cat s whisker A big man hurt me Real bad She looked up The playful twinkle was gone I was ready to stand up, hold her in my arms and tell her things would be fine Her eyes, defiant, filled with pride and intelligence, told me she would have none of that She started dancing again, slowly and

deliberately More memories ensued The tale matured into one dealing with one of society's biggest embarrassments, of black people not being allowed to work on tramcars, of dentists not wanting to treat little children with a specific ethnic background But despite the enormity of all this humiliation, the little girl kept center stage, through her courage, wit and wisdom Her pace quickened and I heard a melody of personal memories, powerful anecdotes and fiery statements of indignation She sang The house was smudged with unspoken thoughts. A bit later she said The unsaid words pushed roughly against the thoughts that we had no craft to verbalize, and crowded the room to uneasiness. Her apparent eloquence made the melodious statement all the profound The need for change bulldozed a road down the center of my mind. My relief melted my fears and they liquidly stole down my face. And then, a momentous description of the wall of racism The girl just told me about how a lady receptionist wouldn't allow her to file a candidacy for a job she was coveting The reasons were hidden yet obvious The girl then sang The miserable little encounter had nothing to do with me, the me of me, any than it had to do with that silly clerk The incident was a recurring dream, concocted years ago by stupid whites and it eternally came back to haunt us all The secretary and I were like Hamlet and Laertes in the final scene, where, because of harm done by one ancestor to another, we were bound to duel to the death Also because the play must end somewhere I went further than forgiving the clerk, I accepted her as a fellow victim of the same puppeteer..I was awestruck, but she was obviously waiting for me to say something What a wonderful tale You're giving that clerk an easy pass there, but I'm sure that once you're a bit older you'll reconsider this imagery, however beautiful it is But how about that bird, little girl You didn't mention it, let alone the reasons for its singing I ain't no little girl no, mister And with that, she stomped off in a fit of pique and out of my sight. I wonder if I'll ever see her again I sure hope so I want to know about that bird. Caged Bird A free bird leaps on the back of the wind and floats downstream till the current ends and dips his wing 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 a

fearful trill of things unknown but longed for still and his tune is heard on the distant hill for the caged birds' songs of freedom. The above poem by Maya Angelou not from this book, BTW encapsulates in a few lines why the voices of protest are the loudest, and the literature the most powerful when it is forcefully suppressed. Because the only thing the caged bird can do is sing, he will keep on doing it, lest he go mad. Poetry will keep on flowing out of the decapitated head of Orpheus. I understand that this book has been banned multiple times. Not surprising, considering that the words of the poet have power than swords or bullets, as proved time and again by history. Maya Angelou born Marguerite Johnson and her brother Bailey were sent to live with their paternal grandmother in Stamps, Arkansas when their parents' marriage fell apart. It was the early thirties, and the North and the South of USA were poles apart as far as coloured people were concerned. In the North, they were part of the society albeit an insular one while in the South, they were the despised niggers. Maya spent most of the formative part of her childhood down south. Her grandmother Momma was a singularly resourceful woman who owned a store they managed to live in relative comfort even during the Depression era. However, this material comfort was offset by the fact that they were always hated other than the whitefolk who lived apart almost a mythical race, in Maya's young mind were powerful and whimsical gods who could visit death and destruction any time on any black man or woman. Even the powhitetrash, the drifters and squatters who had the fortune to be born into the Anglo Saxon race, could insult even the propertied black people with impunity. When she was eight years old, Maya's father took her brother and herself to their mother, Vivian Baxter, in St Louis. Here the incident which was to become the turning point of her life happened. The eight year old girl was raped by her mother's current boyfriend, Mr Freeman. He managed to wiggle out of jail only to be murdered, presumably by Maya's maternal uncles who were also the town toughs. As a result of this, she became a virtual mute for almost five years. Sent back to Stamps, Maya continued her zombie like existence until she was brought back into the world of the living by Bertha Flowers, a teacher and family friend. She did this by the expedient of introducing the girl to books. Maya found refuge in the world of imagination, and slowly came back

to normal. She again went to live with her mother in California when she was 15. During this sojourn, she visited her father in Southern California where another traumatic event in her life took place. After a frightening journey across the border into Mexico along with her father when she was forced to drive a car back to the US in the night with him passed out in the back even though she was not a qualified driver, Maya was attacked and stabbed by her father's girlfriend. She quit home and lived for a month in a junkyard, with similar social drop outs, before returning to her mother. A month of living in the rough had emboldened the shy and withdrawn girl. Maya decided to get a job as a streetcar conductor, even though the occupation was closed to blacks, and succeeded. The activist and rebel were just emerging. The first instalment of this extended autobiography ends with the picture of Maya as a teen mother, of a child conceived out of a casual sexual encounter which she had just to satisfy that she was normal that is, heterosexual. Maya writes with a disarming honesty and a genuine sense of humour. Even the most distressing events are discussed casually. The child's eye view is done really well. The book is eminently readable. Still, is this a great book? I would not say so. Good, yes. Genuinely great, no. The casual tone, for me, took away most of the poignancy. Even the extremely distressing rape incident though described in gory detail fails to really make an impact. My personal feeling is that this is the author's way of coping with personal trauma: you take the emotion out of it. However, it might come across to people that her mother never cared much. I have found this view expressed on one or two of the one star reviews for this book on this site. However, I salute Maya's courage in writing this explicit memoir. Being a black woman, she feels disadvantaged thrice, as she says: 'The Black female is assaulted in her tender years by all those common forces of nature at the same time that she is caught in the tripartite crossfire of masculine prejudice, white illogical hate and Black lack of power. So maybe, the best defence is to attack. Throw the hypocrisy of society back in its face. Say: This is I. Accept me for what I am, whether you like what you see or not.' Sent By Their Mother To Live With Their Devout, Self Sufficient Grandmother In A Small Southern Town, Maya And Her Brother, Bailey, Endure The Ache Of Abandonment And The

Prejudice Of The Local Powhitetrash At Eight Years Old And Back At Her Mother S Side In St Louis, Maya Is Attacked By A Man Many Times Her Age And Has To Live With The Consequences For A Lifetime Years Later, In San Francisco, Maya Learns That Love For Herself, The Kindness Of Others, Her Own Strong Spirit, And The Ideas Of Great Authors I Met And Fell In Love With William Shakespeare Will Allow Her To Be Free Instead Of Imprisoned Poetic And Powerful, I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings Will Touch Hearts And Change Minds For As Long As People Read I have only ever given 5 stars to two autobiographies One was written by a white English man the other by a black American woman On the surface you would think they could have very little in common, yet they do They both have insight and compassion, which comes through in every sentence They have both shown enormous courage in almost intolerable situations In short, they have a common humanity The white man is Terry Waite The black woman, Maya Angelou. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou is a book which will play on your emotions It is not a manipulative book it is a raw and honest account, eloquently expressed But if you did not take a deep breath sometimes before starting another page, you would not be human It is galling to think that this description of poverty and unreasoning prejudice is within living memory, in a so called free country In the United States, the Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity was set up in 1961, prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 It precedes the Race Relations Act of 1965, which was the first legislation in the United Kingdom to address racial discrimination Yet the differences of perception and attitudes between the two countries for the early and middle parts of the 20th Century are enormous Perhaps it is the sheer size of the US, but the racial segregation which was ever present at least in the Southern States was never a feature of English life, or life in Great Britain There was prejudice certainly, and when there was an influx of black people in the 1960 s to fulfil specific job vacancies, such as nursing or bus drivers and conductors, some black people suffered much abuse and humiliation from some members of the indigenous white public, such as landladies putting cards saying no coloureds in their windows But the discrimination was never institutionalised Unlike South Africa and the

Southern States of America, there were no separate schools, townships or public toilets The UK was not a racist society as such, although some individual members of it certainly were What comes across in this book, especially to a non American, is that the racial segregation was condoned It was the norm at all points It seems so entrenched that it is startling that any progress could be made from such a point For this appalling account of ignorance and prejudice is surprisingly recent Maya Angelou was born in 1928, and was therefore slightly younger than my own mother And she was describing events which were closer in time to when she was writing them, than we now are ahead in time It ends in 1944, before the end of World War II This is the first part of her autobiography, which finally ran to seven volumes, the final volume being published in 2013 I knew of Maya Angelou s works of course, but somehow had never got around to reading them I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings had been sitting on my bookshelf for 20 years unread Perhaps part of me suspected it would be a harrowing read, but I had not anticipated its wry humour Maya Angelou died last year, in 2014 There s a sort of poignancy in discovering a writer after they have just died Sometimes it happens because for a short time they achieve prominence generally When the reaction is so positive, the experience is tinged with slight regret, nonsensical though it is For so many long dead classic authors that opportunity is not open to us from the start It would have been nice to appreciate them during their lifetime Will I carry on reading the continuing parts Certainly The five stars are not awarded solely to the person They are awarded to the work, as they should be It is an extraordinary first book, especially considering that the author is someone who feels the voice is essential for meaning, someone who was always recognised as a passionate performance poet From this book alone, Words mean than what is set down on paper It takes the human voice to infuse them with shades of deeper meaning Here is her memory of an inspired natural teacher, Sister Flowers, I had read a Tale of Two Cities and found it up to my standards as a romantic novel She opened the first page and I heard poetry for the first time in my life her voice slid in and curved down through and over the words She was nearly singing As I ate she began the first of what we later called my lessons in living She said that I must always be intolerant of

ignorance but understanding of illiteracy That some people, unable to go to school, were educated and even intelligent than college professors She encouraged me to listen carefully to what country people called mother wit That in those homely sayings was couched the collective wisdom of generations I wanted to look at the pages Were they the same that I had read Or were there notes, music, lined on pages Perhaps then it is not so surprising to find a poetic turn of phrase, such lyrical prose as, in the dying sunlight the people dragged rather than their empty sacks or a beautifully evocative description But be warned Not everything which is graphic here is beautiful imagery, I remember the sense of fear which filled my mouth with hot, dry air, and made my body light 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 The blurb itself, should you read it, will tell the reader of some very disturbing events which are described, but those parts will prompt a deep emotional reaction The work also puts much of her poetry in context the anger and prominent themes in her poetry become all of a piece with the unfolding account of her life And in this, the staggered telling of her tale is also very effective She alternated a book of poetry with a book of autobiography, and these memoirs are far expressive and revealing than one static book of past autobiography could be The gradual telling of her tale feels in the present, than it does reflection The first volume starts with the author, then called Marguerite Johnson at 3 years old, being sent on a train journey with her 4 year old brother Neither had any idea why they were being sent South to live with their grandmother, Mamma in the tiny town of Stamps, Arkansas Most of this first part is about her life there her strict upbringing by the poor, but proud and upright, religious woman, who devoted herself to making as good a life as she could for her disabled son and grandchildren, I was liked, and what a difference it made The store served the needs of all those in Stamps, mostly workers in the cotton fields The recent history of slavery is virtually palpable The conditions at times seemed little better than the past Each day the workers started with optimism, but they were trapped in a life from which realistically they could never escape never being paid enough for their work to get out of debt Yet nearly all these people

were hard working and honest, Although there was always generosity in the Negro neighborhood, it was indulged on pain of sacrifice Whatever was given by Black people to other Blacks was most probably needed as desperately by the donor as by the receiver A fact which made the giving or receiving a rich exchange There are wonderful descriptions of her grandmother's store It is a hub for the community, a working business, but for young Marguerite it is a cornucopia of smells and sights, the store was my favorite place to be Alone and empty in the mornings, it looked like an unopened present from a stranger She remembers the days here, the pride of her handicapped Uncle Willy, the immensely strict regime she and her brother Bailey Junior were expected to cope with Her grandmother, a businesswoman, was much respected in the exclusively black area of Stamps, I remember never believing that whites were really real These others, the strong pale creatures that lived in their alien unlife, weren't considered folks They were white folks People in Stamps used to say that the whites in our town were so prejudiced that a Negro couldn't buy vanilla ice cream She escaped whenever possible into her fantasy world of books, I met and fell in love with William Shakespeare He was my first white love When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes It was a state with which I felt myself most familiar Because I was really white and because a cruel fairy stepmother, who was understandably jealous of my beauty, had turned me into a too big Negro girl, with nappy black hair, broad feet and a space between her teeth that would hold a number two pencil As the author grew older, her perception of bigotry, her indignation at the racial unfairness which pervaded everything in her experience, grew She accepted without understanding the submissive attitudes she was expected to make, and subservience she had to show, observing of Momma, She didn't cotton to the idea that white folks could be talked to at all without risking one's life And certainly they couldn't be spoken to insolently But her grandmother wanted the best for the two children, I swear to God, I rather you have a good mind than a cute behind There is much about loneliness and alienation in this first novel Maya Angelou tried to cultivate a philosophical attitude to her experiences, Hoping for the best, prepared for the worst, and unsurprised by anything in between Like most children, I

thought if I could face the worst danger voluntarily, and triumph, I would forever have power over it But the instances piled one on top of another Even the wild, neglected and dirty poor white trash children jeered, made fun of, and looked down on all the people in the the black neighbourhood A doctor, a dentist people who should have been literally indebted to her grandmother because of the financial help she had afforded them in the past showed truly shocking insulting behaviour when appealed to for help The white people almost exclusively treated the black people worse than they would treat their animals It is difficult to convey without telling the story how each tiny instance was compounded During a court case, The judge had really made a gaffe calling a Negro woman Mrs because, of course, a white person's perception was that a black person did not deserve the status of respect. The book seems to escalate until the reader feels that something has to give. The author reflects that it was perhaps one instance of profound prejudice, which severely affected her brother emotionally, which led to their being sent away from Arkansas They had only lived there a couple of years, when the two children were collected by their father, a cultured giant of a man, and taken back to live with their mother Mother Dear as Bailey called her in St Louis Their lives from this point take a sudden turn, living with this impulsive beautiful butterfly of a woman with her film star looks A crime is committed when Maya is just eight years old This is brutal an appalling account to read, both a physically and psychologically raw and graphic description The child is the victim, but as so often happens, the victim is convinced that she is somehow guilty Circumstances force her to tell a small lie, and for this too, she cannot forgive herself The children return to Momma. The next few years are chronicled in the book with much movement between the adults in the family They have to cope with extremes in moral codes From the earliest chapters the reader has been stunned by the extremist Christian doctrine of their grandmother Beating a child for saying by the way , because never mind whether the child understands or not it was considered to be blasphemy Another small incident which haunts the reader, is Bailey Junior being beaten for yearning so much for his mum, that he watched a similar looking film star, and was late home There are countless such examples These are very hard to

accept, because these two things were perpetrated by the good people the ones with a sense of duty and responsibility. The ignorant prejudice in the wider community, outside the town of Stamps, was oddly easier to read about than this, which felt like a betrayal by the adults whom the children trusted. But later, the moral code is turned on its head. Both Maya's mother and father were city folk working in a very different world. Her father in Mexico had friends who were almost gangsters, with a completely different sense of morality, although in itself the ethical code was just as strong. The needs of a society determine its ethics. These parts are very entertaining to read, and must have been an eye opener to a young teenager from such a narrow background. The book ends when Maya Angelou is 17. Although her given name was Marguerite, she was always called Mayabecause her brother called her My a, trying to say the words my sister. To the little girl, that felt like her true identity, not what others called her. There is one episode in the book, where a white woman tried to call her Mary for her own personal convenience because it was shorter. That is a hugely emotional part of the book. The reader can sense the profound insult, the hidden history of ownership. I gave a mental cheer when Maya managed to turn this around. At 12, Maya had had her graduation from Lafayette County Training School. I personally found this almost the most affecting part of the book. Maya was a supremely talented and hard working child. The reader senses her feelings bubbling over her well earned pride in her achievements. But yet again, because of an incident involving an ignorant white person, her whole world comes crashing down around her ears. Graduation, the hush hush magic time of frills and gifts and congratulations and diplomas, was finished for me before my name was called. The accomplishment was nothing. The meticulous maps, drawn in three colors of ink, learning and spelling decasyllabic words, memorizing the whole of *The Rape of Lucrece* it was for nothing. Donleavy had exposed us. We were maids and farmers, handymen and washerwomen, and anything higher that we aspired to was farcical and presumptuous. Maya Angelou had somehow recovered from the terrible crime against her at 8 years old. How could she possibly recover from this one? How can one person continue to have courage, strength and fight. Isn't it easier just to give up?

and say, Yes Ma amThe Black female is assaulted in her tender years by all those common forces of nature at the same time She is caught in the tripartite crossfire of masculine prejudice, white illogical hate and Black lack of power This is a book that will sometimes make you ashamed to be a member of the human race It is in part a catalogue of Man s inhumanity to man, woman s inhumanity to woman It will also, however, make you proud of what can be achieved One hopes it was cathartic to write, but it is far than the plague of misery sagas which have descended onto our bookshelves in recent years It is nonfiction, but it is as entertaining as a novel parts of it reading like lyrical prose It has some devastating descriptions of brutality, yes, but there is much to smile over too, often in her wry little asides,The custom of letting obedient children be seen but not heard was so agreeable to me that I went one step further Obedient children should not see or hear if they chose not to do so I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings is an important, defining, incredibly brave work for its time of 1969 From a relatively unknown author, a world was firmly introduced to the reality of racial tensions and prejudice in the Southern United States It was a book which would have been very hard to read without the author s strength and humour coming through, and it remains so, over 45 years later The book grips you from its start Maya Angelou has a unique ability to make any reader identify with a poor black child, to experience what they experience, from whatever point the reader is in their own life There is much talk nowadays of the Black Voice Maya Angelou does not alienate She does not seek to select her audience she speaks to us all Her book is self evidently from a black perspective, but she skilfully makes it the reader s own, putting us all firmly in the mind of herself as a child She conveys her various feelings of confusion, pride, hatred, despair, guilt and rage, expressing so well the reasoning behind them at the time Her use of dialect is perfectly balanced for a general reader It is authentic and essential, yet at no point is the reader likely to have to pause, reread and try to interpret I personally have had far difficulty with my experience of classic books which attempt to include a written representation of my own native, regional Yorkshire speech This is part of her great skill as a writer it flows She concentrates on our common humanity This is a book which

can, perhaps should, be read by everyone at least once in their lifetime. It shows how far both an individual and a society can progress within one person's lifetime. The fact that the adult American Negro female emerges a formidable character is often met with amazement, distaste and even belligerence. It is seldom accepted as an inevitable outcome of the struggle won by survivors and deserves respect if not enthusiastic admiration. As tiny Marguerite Johnson might have said although she would have corrected her own grammar, as all people have different vernaculars for different situations, and black people of that time had one language for school and academic pursuits, another for their community, and a third to reinforce white people's expectations of them. We all doin well. It was awful to be Negro and have no control over my life. It was brutal to be young and already trained to sit quietly and listen to charges brought against my color with no chance of defense. We should all be dead. I thought I should like to see us all dead, one on top of the other. A pyramid of flesh with the whitefolks on the bottom, as the broad base, then the Indians with their silly tomahawks and teepees and wigwams and treaties, the Negroes with their mops and recipes and cotton sacks and spirituals sticking out of their mouths. The Dutch children should all stumble in their wooden shoes and break their necks. The French should choke to death on the Louisiana Purchase, while silkworms ate all the Chinese with their stupid pigtailed. As a species, we were an abomination. All of us. I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings. 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. May 2014 I wrote this review a year and a half ago. It is written from the perspective of a parent who cares about what her teenage children read in school. I hope it may be useful to other parents, teens, and anyone else who cares about content and wants to make informed decisions about what they read. I received mostly negative reactions to my review, but also a few positive comments which encouraged me. After a year of

dealing with it all, I wanted to be done and move on, so I closed the comment section. If you wish to read through the comments, you'll see a few posts I wrote in reply. My final comments are in the last two posts. This is my personal reaction to the book, and I support your right to make your own choices about what you read, too. I read this book because my teenage son was going to be required to read it in his English class at school. I did not want to read the book because I was aware of its content. But I felt it necessary in order to be able to talk to the teacher about my objections. So I did not like this book. My degree in Comparative Literature enables me to recognize some literary value in *Caged Bird*, as well as historical and social value. I believe Maya Angelou is a talented writer. I admire some of her poetry. But her series of autobiographical books includes too much explicit and disturbing sexual content for me. And I certainly did not want my 15-year-old son to have to read it. He did not want to read it, and my husband and I completely supported his choice. The most graphic and disturbing sexual material in *Caged Bird* involves the rape of the author as an eight-year-old girl. This horrible experience deeply affects her life. But I believe our teenage children can understand that terrible things like this happen, without needing to be dragged through the muck of the sordid details. Ms. Angelou writes vividly. My son does not want those images in his head, and I fully support him. I can see this book being taught at the college level, but I strongly feel that it is not appropriate for high school required reading. In my son's advanced English class, this book was one of six main texts. In the regular English class, there are only two main texts, and this is one of them. How sad, when there are so many other great literary works to choose from which are clean. My son's teacher was nice and professional about it. Another English teacher was not so nice. She acted surprised that I would characterize the book as R-rated. She said that we could see worse things on prime-time TV. Our my husband's and my response was: That's why we choose not to watch those TV shows. It bothered me that she would try to use the everybody's doing it excuse. Just because our society's standards of decency continue to plummet, is no reason to embrace them. It is an American Lit class, so I suggested a couple of other texts as options if the purpose was to address the African American

experience But this book is obviously one of that teacher s favorites, so she defended it The teachers did say that our son could choose to read a different book However, because the class structure was centered on discussion, we and our son chose to have him read an edited version of Caged Bird instead I just told him which chapters to skip And I m glad that our son happened to have the sympathetic teacher So I m done with my rant now Just needed to get that out I m glad that I love to read so I can be alert to what my children are exposed to at school I know other parents who would also object to this book if they were aware of the content And I understand that it s hard to keep up with our kids sometimes I expect we ll run into this problem again at the high school But on the bright side, I also get to enjoy discussing good books with my children

4.5 lyrical, poignant, honest stars 2018 Honorable Mention Read This was a wonderfully written beginning to Ms Angelou s six volume autobiography I had been wanting to read this for many years and Jean s gorgeous review pushed me over the edge to add this to my shortlist Ms Angelou s writing appears effortless and clear The emotions and honesty ring through and you walk alongside her childhood and feel for her pain, enjoy her laughs and cheer her on her adventures I love that she portrays herself with her anger alongside her compassion and speaks honestly about sexual abuse, abandonment, poverty, race relations, jealousy, desire, perseverance and a deep and uncompromising individuality I will leave you with one of her painful rants about her race and the race of others It was awful to be Negro and have no control over my life It was brutal to be young and already trained to sit quietly and listen to charges brought against my color with no chance of defense We should all be dead I thought I should like to see us all dead, one on top of the other A pyramid of flesh with the whitefolks on the bottom, as the broad base, then the Indians with their silly tomahawks and teepees and wigwams and treaties, the Negroes with their mops and recipes and cotton sacks and spirituals sticking out of their mouths The Dutch children should all stumble in their wooden shoes and break their necks The French should choke to death on the Louisiana purchase 1803 while silkworms ate all the Chinese with their stupid pigtails As a species we were an abomination All of us I look forward to reading the second

volume at some point Rest in peace Ms Angelou and bless you for your contributions to poetry and race relations.

