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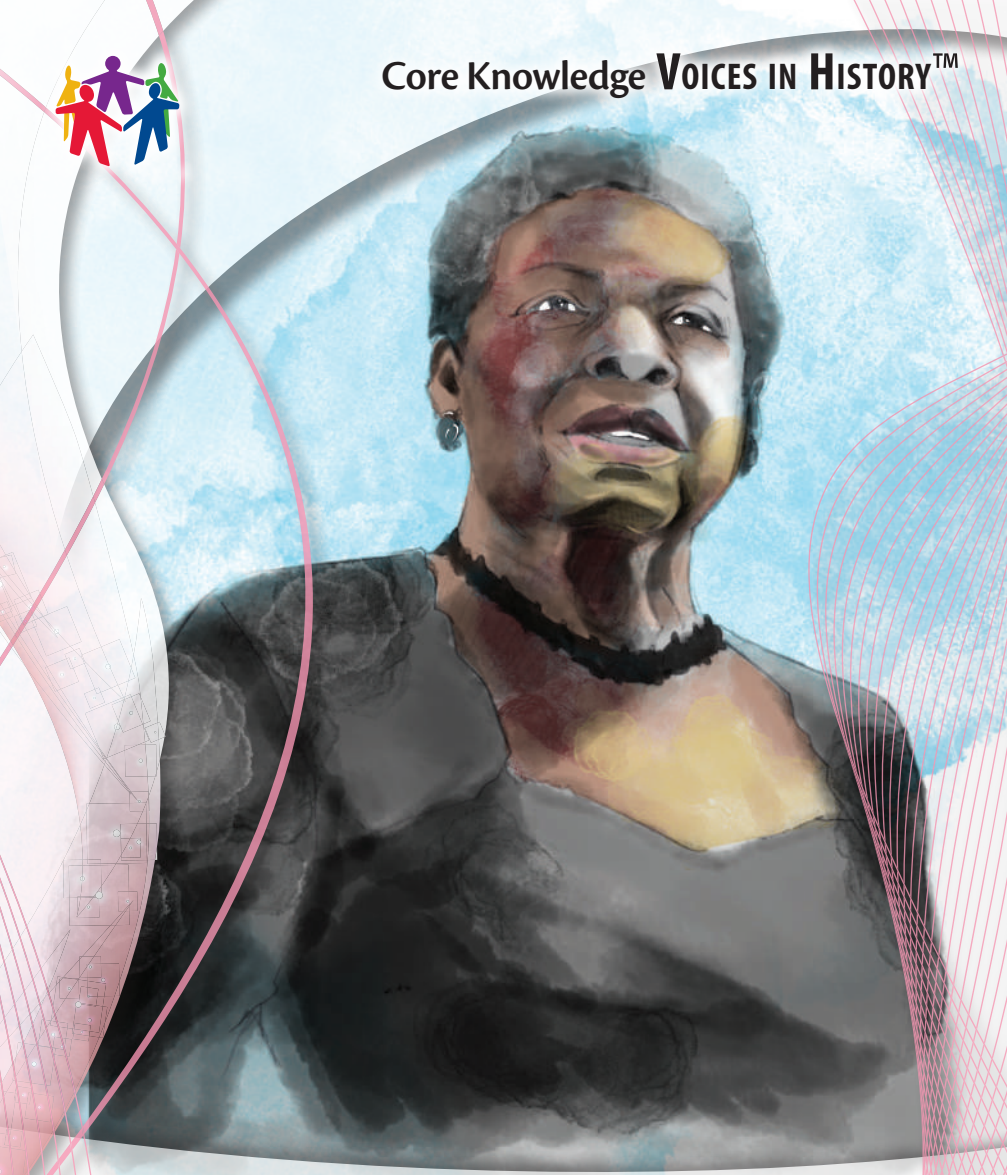

# Maya Angelou

## Finding Her Voice

by Glenda Armand

illustrated by Natalie Riolfi

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# Maya Angelou

## Finding Her Voice

by

*Glenda Armand*

illustrated by *Natalie Riolfi*

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# INTRODUCTION
## She Rose

Maya Angelou was born Marguerite Annie Johnson on April 4, 1928, in St. Louis, Missouri. She spent her childhood in the southern town of Stamps, Arkansas. As a black girl growing up in the South in the 1930s, her future did not look bright. Black people experienced discrimination throughout the United States. They were treated poorly and unequally compared to white people.

However, discrimination was more severe in the South. It was there that it existed in its harshest form. When Marguerite Johnson was a child, many older African Americans in the South still carried the memories and the scars of slavery. Black sharecroppers worked for meager wages in the same fields that their enslaved ancestors had plowed.

Even though slavery had ended in 1865, life was still dangerous for African Americans. Throughout the United States, especially in the South, racial segregation—the separation of races—was strictly enforced. White people and black people lived in different areas of town.

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**discrimination:** treating people unfairly because they belong to a certain group

**sharecroppers:** farmers who rent the land they work and pay for it with a share of their crops

They attended different schools, worshipped at different churches, and worked at different jobs. White people held positions of authority: doctors, lawyers, bankers. Black people performed physical labor as farmhands, maids, nannies, and cooks. These jobs were usually done in service to white people.

At any time, an encounter between a white person and a black person could end in humiliation or physical harm for the black person. Crimes committed by white people against black people went unpunished.

It was in this world that Marguerite came of age. Nevertheless, she would one day become a streetcar conductor, dancer, singer, actor, writer, orator, filmmaker, civil rights activist, and educator.

Of her many talents, it was Marguerite's way with words, written and spoken, that made hers an important voice in history. She wrote prodigiously. She penned poems, essays, novels, cookbooks, and children's books. She was a playwright, screenwriter, and journalist. She met and befriended some of the most notable people of her time—entertainers, artists, politicians, and presidents. Above all, she was a memoirist whose most famous work, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, is a coming-of-age story that chronicles her life up until she reached adulthood.

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**prodigiously:** in large amounts

Marguerite wrote seven autobiographies, each recounting a different period of her amazing life. She shared the wisdom she had gained through a variety of experiences, good and bad. Like all good writers, Marguerite was an avid reader. In this biography, you will encounter some of the writers who inspired Marguerite and helped shape her view of herself and the world.

In telling her story, Marguerite described the challenges that she and her fellow African Americans had to overcome to claim their rights as citizens. She wrote and spoke of her journey to becoming an American icon. That journey included abandonment, loss, childhood trauma, prejudice, and homelessness. Yet, through it all, she endured and triumphed. She rose.

This is the story of how Marguerite Annie Johnson, through the life-changing power of words, found her voice and rose to become the gifted artist known to the world as Maya Angelou.

# 1

## Train Ride

The train rolled along. Three-year-old Marguerite looked way up high into the faces of smiling strangers. She and her four-year-old brother had boarded the train with tags tied to their wrists. The tags read,

*"Marguerite and Bailey Johnson Jr., from Long Beach, California, en route to Stamps, Arkansas, c/o Mrs. Annie Henderson."*

Their parents had divorced. Their father was sending Marguerite and Bailey Jr. to live with his mother. Adults on the train felt sorry for the two "orphans" and fed them cold fried chicken and potato salad.

When the train arrived at their destination, the bewildered children were met by their paternal grandmother, Annie Henderson. She was the tallest woman Marguerite had ever seen. She spoke to the children softly and took their tiny hands into her huge ones. Together, the three of them walked to the place that Marguerite would call home for the next ten years.

# 2

## The Store

Marguerite and Bailey's grandmother owned and operated the Wm. Johnson General Merchandise Store, or, as townspeople called it, "the Store." It was the only store in Stamps owned by an African American.

Marguerite and Bailey lived in the back of the Store with their grandmother and her disabled son, Uncle Willie. Momma, as Marguerite and Bailey began calling their grandmother, sold the typical things people looked for in a general store—not just basic food items but also "colored thread, mash for hogs, corn for chickens, coal oil for lamps, light bulbs for the wealthy, shoestrings, hair dressing, balloons, and flower seeds." If customers did not see what they wanted, Momma ordered it.

Early on, Marguerite discovered that the Store was much more than a place to buy baking powder and sugar. It served as a gathering place for the black community, the place where people gathered to hear the news of the day. On Saturdays, the town barbers would sit on the

Store's porch and cut their customers' hair. Townspeople who had musical talent sang songs and strummed their cigar-box guitars.

When they were old enough, Marguerite and Bailey worked in the Store alongside Momma and Uncle Willie. As they stocked the shelves or swept the dusty floor, the children recited their school lessons and their times tables.

Customers marveled at the siblings' ability to do mental math when adding up their bills. "Sister Henderson sure got some smart grandchildrens," they would say. The Store was Marguerite's favorite place to be.

To Marguerite, Bailey was the "greatest person in [her] world." A year older but shorter than Marguerite, Bailey was extremely protective of his sister. It was Bailey who had given her the name "Maya." When his mother had brought the new baby home, Bailey called her "Mya Sister" at first, then just "My," and then, eventually, "Maya."

Maya saw herself as "big, elbowy and grating," while Bailey was "small, graceful and smooth." Sometimes an elder would admire Bailey's curly locks while tsk-tsking Maya's wiry hair. Bailey had his ways of responding to the unkind words. He might say, in mock concern, "Oh, Mrs. Coleman, I saw your son the other day, and he looked like he might die from the uglies!"

Maya and Bailey were both avid readers. They read novels by Charles Dickens and plays by William Shakespeare. They recited poetry by Edgar Allen Poe and James Weldon Johnson.

Maya and Bailey were inseparable. Being abandoned by their parents was just the first of many traumas, or painful experiences, that created a bond between the siblings that would last throughout their turbulent lives.

# 3

## Black and White Stamps

Maya and Bailey adjusted to life in Stamps under Momma's strict but loving care. They excelled in school and went to church every Sunday. When their chores were done, they played hide-and-seek and pop-the-whip with the other children.

The siblings learned that Stamps was divided into two parts: black Stamps and white Stamps. There were no signs that told you where you were. You just knew. Black people only went to the white part of town if they had business there or if they worked as a nanny, a maid, or a cook.

Maya and Bailey learned their manners, respected their elders, and followed the rules:

- A child never looks a grown person in the eyes.
- All adults must be addressed as Mister, Missus, Miss, Auntie, Uncle, Sister, Brother, or Cousin.
- When you answer an adult, you say, "Yes, sir," and "No, ma'am."

Black children in Stamps always followed these rules. Maya could not understand why the white children who sometimes wandered into the black part of town were allowed to break them. She burned with anger one day when a white family entered the Store. The white children climbed on the shelves and crawled into the potato bin. They called Uncle Willie by his first name and ordered him around. To Maya's dismay, he obeyed them. Even Momma, whom the white children called "Annie," followed their orders. Maya could not wait until the family left the Store.

Unlike the unruly children who came into the black section of Stamps, Maya and Bailey seldom ventured into "whitefolksville." However, at least twice a year, Momma sent them to the butcher to buy fresh meat. The only butcher in Stamps was in the white section. When they arrived at the shop, they remembered what Momma had told them: "The less you say to white folks, the better." The children bought their fresh liver and hurried back to safety and familiarity: smiling neighbors, playful friends, Uncle Willie, and Momma.

It had been three years since they had arrived in Stamps. By now, the little town was home, and they were happy. Uncle Willie and Momma were the only parents they knew. Maya believed that their real mother and

father had died. They must be dead. Otherwise, why would they have sent their children away?

Then, one Christmas, when Maya was about six years old, she and Bailey found out that their parents, Vivian Baxter Johnson and Bailey Johnson Sr., were very much alive.

As the children unwrapped gifts under the shimmering Christmas tree, they came across some unexpected presents: a white doll, a tea set, and a picture of their father. Tears streamed down Maya's and Bailey's faces. The toys were gifts from their parents. Their mother and father were alive!

Why had their parents sent them away? Had they done something wrong? Were their parents ready to forgive them for whatever they had done? Were their mother and father going to come and get them now?

About a year later, a big, shiny, gray automobile came to a stop in front of the Store. Out stepped Bailey Johnson Sr.

Momma, Uncle Willie, and Bailey were happy to see him. Maya barely remembered him. She was quiet and shy around her big, boisterous father. She was relieved when, three weeks after he rolled into town, he decided to leave.

**boisterous:** loud and energetic

But then, to everyone's surprise, Bailey Sr. declared that he was going to take seven-year-old Maya and eight-year-old Bailey Jr. with him! He would bring them to live with their mother.

Bailey Jr. quickly agreed to the plan. But Maya was confused and frightened. She wanted to stay with Momma. Her parents were strangers to her. But if Bailey went, she had to go. She could not live without her brother.

In any case, the decision had been made. Momma made skirts and jumpers for Maya to wear. Some evenings, Momma would look at her granddaughter sadly and tell her to be a good girl. "Don't you make people think I didn't raise you right."

# 4

## St. Louis

Bailey Sr. and his children left early one morning. It wasn't until they were in the car that Maya learned that they were not going to California. Instead, they were going to St. Louis, Missouri, where her mother now lived. They arrived in St. Louis before dinnertime. They went straight to the home of Maya and Bailey's maternal grandparents, the Baxters. Their grandfather was dark-skinned, and their grandmother had white skin and spoke with a German accent. The couple greeted their grandchildren warmly, calling them "Ritie" and "Junior."

The children waited nervously for their mother to come to the house to greet them. When she finally came, Maya knew immediately why their mother had sent them away: "She was too beautiful to have children." As for Bailey, he fell immediately in love with his mother.

A few days after they arrived, the children's father left St. Louis and headed back to California. This did not bother Maya. He was a stranger, and he was leaving her

**maternal grandparents:** the parents of one's mother

and her brother in the care of strangers. What difference did it make? To Maya, the St. Louis, Missouri, of 1935 was like a foreign country. She would never get used to flushing toilets, packaged foods, or the constant sounds of trains and automobiles. Maya's mother's family and friends were as different from the people in Stamps as they could be. The Baxters were prominent and powerful in St. Louis. They knew important people: politicians, police officers, and business owners.

Vivian Baxter was a dancer at Louie's, a tavern that offered food, drink, and entertainment. Sometimes Vivian brought Maya and Bailey to the tavern. She even taught them a popular dance called the Time Step. The children danced to the applause of the tavern's customers.

Their mother enrolled them in Toussaint L'Ouverture Grammar School. Maya and Bailey were more advanced than the other students in their classes. They had learned math by working in the Store. They were excellent readers because reading was their favorite pastime. The teachers did not want these "country children" to embarrass their classmates, so Maya and Bailey were moved up a grade. Maya was placed in third grade, and Bailey in fourth.

For the first part of the school year, Bailey and Maya lived with their grandparents. In the winter, they moved

**prominent:** well-known and respected

in with their mother. Many times when they arrived home from school, their mother was not there.

Often, when their mother was at work or running errands, Mr. Freeman, their mother's boyfriend, would stay with them. To Maya, he seemed like a kind man. He played games with her and made her feel special. But Maya soon learned that Mr. Freeman was not a good man.

He mistreated Maya, and though he was punished for mistreating her, the terrible memory of that experience remained with her forever. The memory was so terrible that she refused to talk about it. In fact, Maya simply stopped speaking altogether. The only person she would talk to was Bailey. At first, Maya's family treated her with extra kindness and care. They accepted Maya's silence. But then, days, weeks, then months passed without Maya saying a word. The family grew impatient with Maya's muteness. They even spanked her for not talking.

Finally, Maya and Bailey were sent back to Momma. Once again, the siblings were on a train headed to Stamps. This time, Bailey cried all the way. He wanted to stay with their mother. Maya was sad that Bailey was so unhappy. But she did not care that she was leaving. She did not care where she was going.

# 5

## Mrs. Flowers

Maya and Bailey had spent about a year in St. Louis. When they returned to Stamps, they were celebrities! Everyone in town came to the Store "to see the travelers." Maya and Bailey were bombarded with questions. What was it like up north? How tall were the buildings? Did they ride in an elevator? Were white folks up there any different?

Maya sat quietly as Bailey answered the questions. He spun dramatic tales of life in the big city. He bragged that everyone in St. Louis wore new clothes and had indoor toilets.

People assumed that Maya remained mute because she was sad that she'd had to return to Stamps. But Maya's refusal to speak to anyone but Bailey continued long after people stopped coming around to hear stories about St. Louis. She was silent at home, at school, at church.

One day, Momma introduced her granddaughter to Mrs. Beulah Flowers. Maya thought of Mrs. Flowers as

"the aristocrat of Black Stamps." In Maya's eyes, she was everything a gentlewoman should be, and everything a person *could* be.

One summer afternoon, after Mrs. Flowers had finished shopping at the Store, she said to Maya, "Come and walk along with me, Marguerite."

Maya loved the way Mrs. Flowers pronounced "Marguerite." As Maya carried her groceries home for her, Mrs. Flowers told Maya that she understood that she was doing excellent written work in school. But, she added, she had also heard that Marguerite was not speaking in school.

They kept walking, and the gentlewoman kept talking. She told Maya that language was what separated humans from "the lower animals." Maya had never thought about that before.

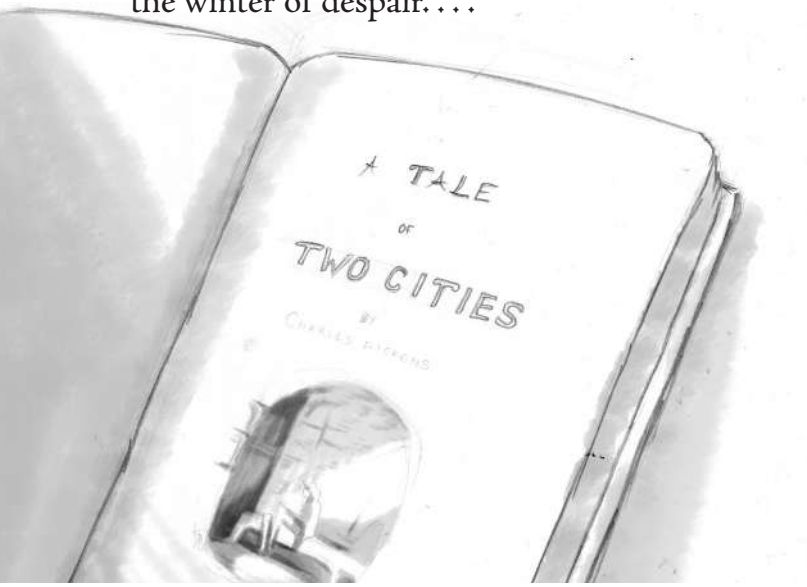
The gentlewoman told Maya that it took the human voice to give words greater meaning. Maya considered Mrs. Flowers's words. Since she had returned from St. Louis, the only place she had found happiness was in the quiet, peaceful library.

When they arrived at Mrs. Flowers's house, they sat and drank lemonade and nibbled on cookies in the neat,

**aristocrat:** someone of high social status

pretty living room. Then Mrs. Flowers took a book from her bookcase and began reading aloud. Maya immediately recognized *A Tale of Two Cities*, a novel set during the French Revolution, written by Charles Dickens. Maya had read the novel, but when Mrs. Flowers read the beginning aloud, it was the first time Maya *heard* the words:

> It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair. . . .




**epoch:** an important or memorable time period
**incredulity:** disbelief

To Maya, it sounded as if Mrs. Flowers were singing. When the gentlewoman closed the book and asked Maya if she had liked what she had just read to her, Maya mumbled, "Yes, ma'am."

Then Mrs. Flowers handed her a book of poems. She asked Maya to memorize one of the poems and recite it for her the next time she paid a visit.

Maya could barely contain her joy on the way home. Mrs. Flowers had made cookies and lemonade just for *her*. The most sophisticated lady in Stamps had read to *her* and asked *her* to memorize a poem and to recite it.

The lovely Mrs. Flowers was right. Words were meant to be spoken. Mrs. Flowers made Maya want to speak again.


POEMS

# 6

## Graduation

About the time Maya rediscovered her voice, she met her first friend, Louise Kendricks. They were in the same grade at Lafayette County Training School, the only school for black children in Stamps. Unlike Central High School, the school for white children, the training school had no lawn, hedges, or tennis court. Its two buildings, one for high school students and one for elementary students, sat on a dirt hill.

The school years flew by. Soon Maya and Louise were in eighth grade, and like everyone else in Stamps, they were excited when graduation time came for the eighth and twelfth graders. Maya had no absences or tardies, and despite her years-long silence, her academic work was among the best in her grade. She would graduate near the top of her class.

Maya was grateful for her wonderful graduation gifts. She received a Mickey Mouse watch from Momma and Uncle Willie. Bailey, who had graduated from eighth grade the year before, proudly gave her the gift he had been saving up for months to buy: a leatherbound

collection of poems by Edgar Allen Poe. Many of the customers who came into the Store handed Maya a nickel or a dime, encouraging her to "keep on moving to higher ground." From her best friend, Louise, Maya received four embroidered handkerchiefs. Maya gave Louise three crocheted doilies.

Graduation day finally arrived. Momma hung a sign on the Store's front door that read,

***"CLOSED. GRADUATION."***

Wearing a lovely pattern of braids and a beautiful yellow dress Momma had made her, Maya, along with Momma, Bailey, and Uncle Willie, headed for the school.

The principal welcomed the graduates, families, and friends. The main speaker was a local white politician, Mr. Edward Donleavy. He said he was happy to be there. He mentioned that, thanks to him, improvements and new equipment would be coming soon to the two schools in Stamps. He said that a well-known artist would be coming to teach art at Central High School. *What about Lafayette?* asked Maya silently. In addition, the students at Central would be receiving new microscopes and chemistry equipment. *And Lafayette?* Maya's heart sank.

Then Mr. Donleavy proudly announced that if he won the upcoming election, Lafayette County Training

School would be sure to receive new equipment for the home economics class, where girls learned to be maids and cooks, and for the workshop, where boys learned to be handymen and farmers.

Maya could feel that the mood of the other graduates and their families matched hers. They understood what Mr. Donleavy was saying: that the white students would learn to become "Galileos and Madame Curies and Edisons," and the black students would have no such opportunities. Mr. Donleavy finished his speech and left, undoubtedly proud of his announcements. He had no idea that he was taking with him the joy, hope, and promise that, until he spoke, had filled the room.

The names of the graduates were called, and they walked across the stage to receive their diplomas. When "Marguerite Johnson" was called, Maya was so deep in thought that she did not hear her name and had to be nudged. *What good was a diploma to a future maid?*

Then something happened. After the valedictorian delivered his speech, he began singing a poem by James Weldon Johnson that had been set to music, "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing." The words Maya had heard many times before now had new meaning:

**valedictorian:** the student with the highest rank in a graduating class

Sing a song full of the faith that
the dark past has taught us,

Sing a song full of the hope that
the present has brought us;

Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,

Let us march on till victory is won.

The lyrics gave Maya hope again. She and her people had survived. The road ahead might be stony, but they would survive. The sun would shine. They would rise.

# 7

## California

Shortly after graduation, Momma informed Maya and Bailey that they were going to go live with their mother, who had moved back to California. Momma gave them several reasons: She was getting old. Maya and Bailey were growing up. They needed to be with their mother.

But Maya believed that the real reason her grandmother wanted them to leave Stamps had to do with a sad truth about the South in 1940: it was not a safe place for black people—especially black men. Maya was convinced that Momma made the decision to send them to California the afternoon that Bailey came into the Store trembling, his face gray, unable to speak.

Momma asked, "What's the matter, Bailey Junior?"

When Bailey calmed down, he explained what had shocked and terrified him: he had seen some people pull a dead black man out of a pond. A white man had approached the group and pulled off the sheet the dead man was wrapped in. Instead of looking horrified like Bailey felt, the white man had grinned and laughed.

With more sadness than anger, Bailey asked, "Uncle Willie, why do they hate us so much?"

Uncle Willie replied that white people didn't really hate them. "They don't know us," he said. "How can they hate us?" Instead, they were mostly afraid.

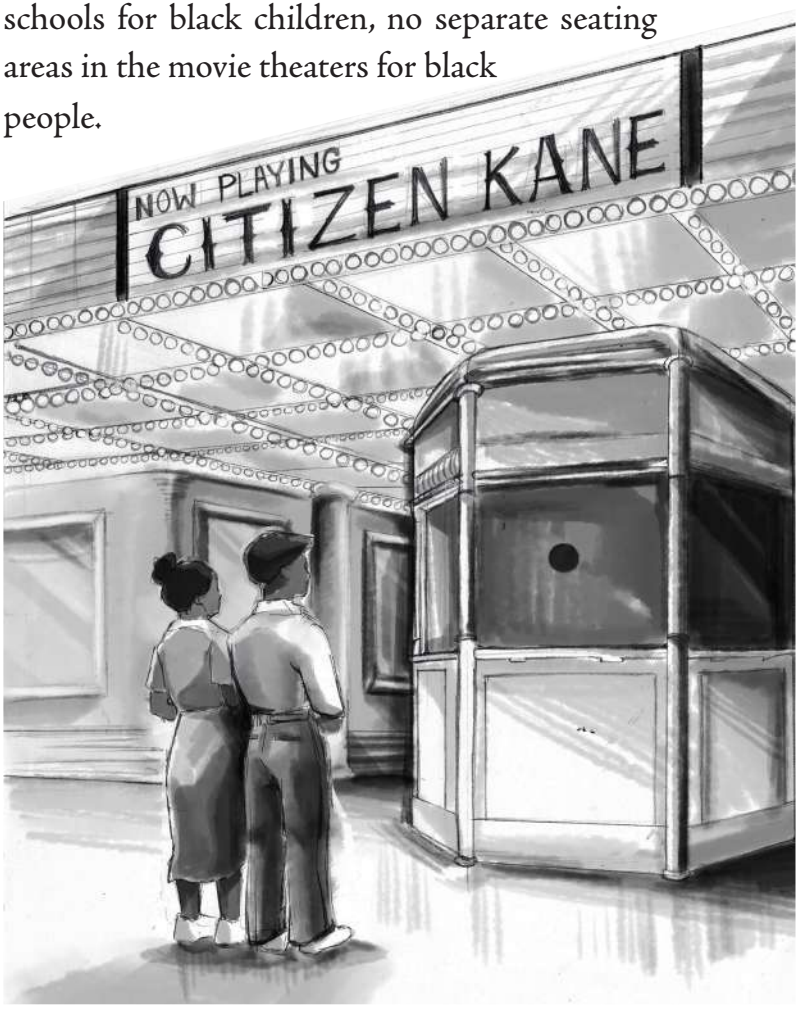
"God rest his soul, poor man," said Momma. She knew that the dead man had probably just said the wrong thing or looked at someone the wrong way. And whoever had killed him would never be punished. Momma looked at Bailey. He was smart and independent and spoke his mind. Stamps was a dangerous place for someone like him.

Shortly after that terrible day, Momma, Maya, and Bailey took a train to southern California. Maya would miss her friend Louise, and she felt sad for Uncle Willie. He didn't say so, but Maya was sure that he would miss her and Bailey very much. Maya would not miss Mrs. Flowers. The gentlewoman had given Maya a gift that she would have for the rest of her life: books and the beauty of the spoken word. And so Mrs. Flowers would always be with her.

In 1941, thirteen-year-old Maya, fourteen-year-old Bailey, and Momma arrived in Los Angeles. Momma stayed with Bailey and Maya until their mother finished making arrangements for her children to join her in northern California. After seeing Momma safely on

the train back to Stamps, Vivian drove her children to Oakland, where her family, the Baxters, had relocated.

Maya and Bailey attended school, and on Sundays they went to the movies instead of church. Maya noticed that California did not practice the same kind of segregation she had experienced in Stamps. There were no separate schools for black children, no separate seating areas in the movie theaters for black people.



On Sunday, December 7, 1941, Maya was on her way to the movies when people began running through the streets shouting, "We're at war!"

Japanese pilots had just attacked American ships docked at the Pearl Harbor naval base in Hawaii. Maya was afraid she would be bombed as she ran home. She arrived in one piece, and Grandmother Baxter assured her that the mainland would not be bombed. President Franklin Roosevelt knew what he was doing. The next day, the United States entered World War II.

***Pearl Harbor***

*December 7, 1941, was supposed to be a day of rest for the soldiers at Hawaii's Pearl Harbor naval base. But at 7:55 a.m. local time, Japanese fighter planes began bombing the U.S. ships moored in the harbor.*

*The sudden attack took many by surprise, but the Japanese had been planning it for months. They wanted to control more territory and useful resources in the South Pacific during World War II, and the U.S. military presence at the nearby Pearl Harbor was a threat to that plan.*

*As a result of the bombing, nineteen U.S. naval vessels were sunk or damaged, 188 aircraft were destroyed, and 2,335 service members were killed. Sixty-eight civilians also lost their lives.*

*The day after the attack, the United States declared war on Japan, officially entering World War II.*

Shortly after the United States entered the war, Vivian Baxter remarried. Maya and Bailey moved to San Francisco with their mother and their new stepfather, Daddy Clidell.

Maya enrolled in George Washington High School. She was one of just a handful of black students at the school. Some teachers made a point of being nice to her, while others refused to acknowledge her. Maya's favorite teacher, Miss Kirwin, did neither. Miss Kirwin, who taught civics and current events, greeted students each day with "Good day, ladies and gentlemen." Maya had never known an adult to be so respectful of teenagers.

Later, Maya would write that "George Washington High School was the first real school I attended." For years, whenever she returned to San Francisco, Maya made it a point to visit Miss Kirwin. Maya thanked her for her encouragement. Miss Kirwin had assured teenage Maya that she "had a good mind and should be doing something with it." Of all the teachers Maya ever had, Miss Kirwin was the only one she remembered.

# 8

## Stony the Road

In the summer of 1943, Maya's father invited fifteen-year-old Maya to spend time with him in San Diego. A few weeks into her vacation, Maya's father decided to take her on a short trip across the border to Mexico.

Bailey Johnson Sr., who spoke fluent Spanish, seemed to be well-known in the little village they visited. The villagers threw a fiesta for him. After a night of partying, Maya's father fell asleep in the back seat of his car. Maya, who had never driven before, got behind the wheel and navigated treacherous mountain roads in the dead of night. She drove for fifty miles before her father woke up and drove the rest of the way home.

Upon their return to San Diego, Maya got into a fight with her father's girlfriend. Maya left the house and found herself wandering alone on the streets of San Diego. Not wanting to go back to her father, she bonded with a group of homeless teenagers who spent their nights in a junkyard. Maya decided to stay with them for a while.

The teenagers formed a community. They worked

**fiesta:** festival or party

odd jobs during the day, collecting bottles, sweeping pool halls, and mowing lawns. They shared their money. On Saturday nights, they entered dance contests. Maya and her partner danced the jitterbug, a popular dance at the time. Maya felt connected to the teenagers, who were white, black, and Hispanic. Nevertheless, after a month of homelessness, Maya called her mother, who sent her daughter a plane ticket back to San Francisco.

Everything seemed different. San Francisco had lost its charm. The house she shared with her mother, Bailey, and Daddy Clidell seemed smaller. And while Maya was living in a junkyard in San Diego, Bailey had begun spending time with a group of rowdy teens. He was barely interested in hearing about his sister's misadventures in San Diego and Mexico. It seemed that Maya and Bailey were growing apart. However, there was one thing they still shared: a love of dancing.

Maya and Bailey went to dances in the city auditorium. They danced the jitterbug, the Lindy, the Big Apple, and the Half-Time Texas Hop. Tall Maya and cute Bailey became known as "those dancing fools."

In the meantime, Bailey and their mother were in constant conflict. So, even though Bailey was only sixteen, his mother got him a job as a dining car waiter with the Southern Pacific Railroad. Bailey was glad to have a job that would take him away from home.

After Bailey left, Maya became bored with life and needed a change. She decided to get a job, too. Her mother wasn't difficult to convince. In school, Maya was a year ahead of the other students her age, and her mother was a firm believer in self-sufficiency. "Give it everything you've got," she told Maya.

Maya had always admired the uniforms of San Francisco's streetcar conductors. The conductors stood on the back platforms of the streetcars, collecting fares and telling passengers to watch their step.

Since World War II had begun and men were going off to fight, women were replacing men in many jobs, including as conductors. Maya applied for the job, listing her age as nineteen instead of fifteen.

At first, Maya was not even allowed an interview. She believed that it was not because she was too young or because she was female. She believed it was because of her race. However, Maya persisted and was eventually hired. For one semester, she saw the undulating streets of the city from the back of a San Francisco streetcar.

Maya's experience as a conductor was brief. But her proud mother assured her that it had lasted long enough to teach Maya that she had power and determination. "With those two things," she told Maya, "you can go anywhere and everywhere."

Maya returned to school for the second semester of her junior year. She realized that she now had little in common with her classmates. She had a bank account and clothes she had bought herself. She had driven a car down a foreign mountainside and slept in a wrecked automobile for a month. She had been the first black female streetcar conductor in San Francisco history.

She could not relate to her fellow students, who were

**undulating:** appearing to move in waves

excited about winning football games and voting for the next student body president. There was nothing more that George Washington High School could teach her. Maya began cutting classes and spending time with boys. Even so, just as World War II came to an end, Maya graduated with her class in the spring of 1945.

Then Maya's life took an unexpected turn. Shortly after graduating, she had a baby. The baby's teenage father wanted nothing to do with fatherhood. Maya's mother helped her take care of the baby until Maya decided that she and her son, Clyde, would move to southern California. She visited her mother's family in Los Angeles before moving on to San Diego. But after several months, Maya realized she did not like the kind of life she was living in San Diego. Her friends were involved in activities that were not legal or safe. It was not a good environment for herself or her son.

Eighteen-year-old Maya decided to return to the place where she had spent many happy childhood days: Stamps. She was excited to see Momma and Uncle Willie, and they were overjoyed to see her and Clyde. However, it was only a matter of weeks before Maya realized that she had changed too much, and Stamps had changed too little, for her to ever call the dusty southern town home again.

# 9

## A Professional Dancer

Maya and one-year-old Clyde returned to San Francisco and moved back in with her mother. Maya found a low-paying job as a cook in a gloomy diner. The customers looked defeated and depressed, and Maya couldn't help but feel the same. She was an eighteen-year-old single mother barely scraping by.

One day after work, Maya went into a record shop across the street from the diner. As she listened to the dance music that filled the shop, Maya talked to the friendly saleswoman about dancing. Maya reminisced about learning to dance from her mother years before in St. Louis, taking dance classes in high school, entering jitterbug contests, and briefly attending a modern dance studio in San Diego. Maya lost herself in the music, swaying and dreaming that something or someone might take her away from her unhappy existence.

Then one day, a man named R. L. Poole rang her

**reminisced:** thought about past experiences

doorbell. He was a dancer looking for a partner. He said that the woman at the record shop had given him Maya's address.

Maya auditioned for him on the spot. As she did a split, her skirt tore at the seams and her foot got caught on her mother's oak table. But miraculously, R. L. Poole still hired her, and Maya became a professional dancer. Their dance act was a big hit. They got more and more bookings at nightclubs around the city. Maya quit her job at the diner. Even though she was making very little money, she was happy. She was in show business.

But no sooner than it had begun, her career was over. Poole's former partner came back to town. Maya was out of a job.

It would be five years before Maya would get another job as a dancer. Those five years were tumultuous. She married a white sailor named Tosh Angelos. Three years later, they divorced. Her son Clyde started school. Bailey, married and, tragically, became a widower. Momma, Maya's beloved grandmother, died. And yet, having lived through all these experiences, Maya was just twenty-five years old.

Contemplating her future as she walked alone on the

**tumultuous:** full of change and uncertainty

streets of San Francisco, Maya stopped in front of a sign that read, "Female Dancers Wanted. Good take-home pay." Maya auditioned for the job. She was hired! She became a showgirl at the Garden of Allah nightclub for the enormous sum of seventy-five dollars a week plus tips.

After a few months of being the only black dancer at the club, Maya was fired because the other dancers were jealous of the attention she was receiving. This time, Maya immediately found another job, as a singer at the Purple Onion nightclub.

Maya was still known to most people as Marguerite or Rita Johnson. The manager at the Purple Onion said that she needed a more exciting name. Maya suggested that she use the name that her brother called her and a slight variation of her former husband's name. She would be known as Maya Angelou, the calypso singer. Standing-room-only crowds loved the Caribbean rhythm of her singing and dancing.

Soon, Maya was being interviewed by newspaper reporters and radio shows and invited to sing on television. People started to recognize her on the street. One admirer started a Maya Angelou fan club. It was her first taste of fame—and she liked it.

***Calypso***

*Calypso is a style of Caribbean folk music that originated in Trinidad and remains popular today. Its syncopated, or offbeat, rhythms can be traced back to West African musical traditions. It is characterized by witty lyrics arranged in a ballad structure and often follows a call-and-response format.*

# 10

## New Experiences

One night, Maya took a night off from work to go see a new, all-black opera that was being performed in San Francisco, *Porgy and Bess*. She had expected to be entertained. She found herself spellbound. After the final curtain fell on the tragic love story of the disabled Porgy and the beautiful Bess, Maya sat glued to her seat, stunned by the magnificent performance. *Porgy and Bess* had shown her the greatest display of African American talent she had ever seen.

A few days later, the crowd at the Purple Onion seemed larger than usual. One beautiful woman brought a single long-stemmed rose to the stage and left it at Maya's feet. Partway through the next song, Maya suddenly realized who she was: she, and the others at her table, were all cast members of *Porgy and Bess*.

After the show, the cast members approached Maya to compliment her on her singing and dancing. They came back the next night with more people from the opera. And the night after that, on their recommendation, the

producer of *Porgy and Bess* came to the Purple Onion just to see Maya perform. He told her that he needed to hire a dancer before the company left for Europe, where they would perform the opera for two years. He invited her to audition.

Maya could not believe her good fortune. She had always wanted to travel, to learn other languages, to see the cities she had read about all her life. And most of all, she wanted to be with a large, friendly group of passionate, talented black performers. Maya was chosen to play the part of Ruby, a minor character in the play.

There was only one heart-wrenching problem: she would have to leave nine-year-old Clyde for two years. Even though he would live with his grandmother and her close friend, known as Aunt Lottie to Maya and Clyde, Maya felt pangs of guilt. She and Bailey had been abandoned by their parents. Now she was going to do the same to Clyde. But she had to work. She vowed she would make it up to him and, one day, take him to all the places that she was going to see.

Maya was overwhelmed by the beauty of the fabled cities of Verona and Venice, Italy. The Italians were friendly and welcoming. Opening night of *Porgy and Bess* was a huge success. Maya and company went on to perform in France, Egypt, Israel, and Greece.


Maya soaked in the new experiences—the food, clothing, language, and people. She basked in the sunlight of lands where it seemed, unlike in the United States, black people were treated as equals.

After less than a year in Europe, Maya received a troubling letter from her mother. Clyde was doing poorly. He needed his mother. Maya returned home.

Maya's first priority was to tend to her son. While his mother was away, Clyde had developed a severe rash, and he had become sullen and withdrawn. Now he clung to her, terrified that her return was only temporary. Maya promised her son that she would never leave him again.

Soon, Clyde's skin condition improved, and he regained his confidence and spirit. He also decided to change his name. He tried out a few different names before deciding that he wanted to be called "Guy." Maya honored his request. After all, hadn't she changed her own name?

From then on, whenever Maya traveled, she took her son with her. Mother and son lived in Hawaii for a while, and then Los Angeles, as Maya returned to singing and dancing in nightclubs.

Maya also began writing. At first, she wrote sketches, or short plays, then song lyrics. After a while, she tried her hand at short stories. She had the great fortune of meeting John Oliver Killens, a black novelist and screenwriter. Mr. Killens told Maya that her writing showed "undeniable talent."

In 1959, following Mr. Killens's advice, Maya, now thirty-one years old, moved with fourteen-year-old Guy

to New York to join the Harlem Writers Guild, a group of African American writers who would meet to support, share, and critique each other's writing projects.


While Maya was becoming a serious writer, she still had bills to pay. So she found jobs singing in nightclubs. She even had the high honor of singing at the famous Apollo Theater. Nevertheless, Maya had already decided show business wasn't her calling. She was a *good* singer and dancer, but she believed that she could become a *great* writer. Still, she wasn't ready to quit show business just yet.

Maya was impressed that the other members of the Writers Guild were involved in politics and civil rights. She believed that it was important to make people think while they were being entertained. Maya found a way to do just that—to combine show business and politics.

***Politics***

*When people choose to live together and form any kind of a community (club, church, country, etc.), they must make decisions and create rules that they agree to live by. This process is called politics. The people who make the rules are called politicians.*

***Civil Rights***

*The Constitution of the United States gives its citizens rights that are called* civil rights.

*When slavery ended in 1865, even though African Americans became full citizens, they were still denied their civil rights. Southern states passed laws to keep black Americans separate, or segregated, from white people.*

*The struggle to gain those rights, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, is known as the civil rights movement. The civil rights movement gave rise to many brave leaders who fought against these injustices.*

# 11

## Maya, Martin, and Malcolm

One day, Maya and a friend of hers, actor Godfrey Cambridge, went to hear an up-and-coming young preacher, the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., speak at a church in Harlem. Maya was spellbound as Reverend King's sonorous voice filled the church. He said that black people had "the glorious task of reclaiming the soul and saving the honor of the country."

***The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.***

*Martin Luther King Jr. was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia. Both a reverend and an academic, he was the most famous leader of the civil rights movement. He used nonviolent, or peaceful, protests to fight for equal rights for African Americans.*

*He was a founder and the first president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The SCLC organized civil rights protest activities across the South, including boycotts, marches, and sit-ins.*

**sonorous:** deep and resonant

*Dr. King led a bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, during which black people refused to ride the city buses until they were free to sit wherever they chose rather than being forced to ride in the back. After a year, the boycott was successful.*

*In 1963, he gave his famous "I Have a Dream" speech, in which he shared his vision of equality and justice for African Americans.*

*Dr. King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. However, many people did not want the kinds of changes he was striving for. Dr. King was assassinated on April 4, 1968.*

*Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday became a national holiday in 1983.*

After hearing the civil rights leader's speech, Maya and Godfrey were moved to take action. They knew that Reverend King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) needed money to carry on their important work of ending segregation and discrimination. With the help of their friends in the entertainment industry, Maya and Godfrey put on a show to raise money for the SCLC's cause. *Cabaret for Freedom* opened to rave reviews and sold-out crowds. At the end of each performance, the cast and audience joined in singing "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing"—the same song that had given Maya hope all those years ago. *Cabaret for Freedom* proved to be a great fundraiser. The people

**boycott:** refusal to take part in something

at SCLC were so impressed with Maya's leadership and organizational skills that they asked her to become the coordinator of their New York office. She accepted.

After working for SCLC for two months, Maya had still not met its famous leader face-to-face. Then, one day, she walked into her office to find Martin Luther King Jr. sitting at her desk! As they conversed, Maya was amazed that this world-famous leader took a personal interest in her and her family. When she mentioned her brother, Bailey, Dr. King asked what Bailey was doing now. Maya hesitated. Ever since the death of his wife, Bailey had made one bad choice after another. Maya told Dr. King that her beloved thirty-three-year-old brother was in prison for selling stolen goods. Dr. King was understanding. He said that disappointment drove young black men to make poor choices out of desperation. That was all the more reason, he said, that they must continue the fight. They "must save the Baileys of the world."

Maya became more and more involved in politics and civil rights. In January 1961, she got a chance to hear another civil rights leader speak. She joined a crowd that had gathered on a street corner to listen to the black Muslim minister Malcolm X. He addressed every person in the crowd as soldiers in the fight for the freedom of black people.

***Malcolm X***

*Malcolm X was an African American religious and political leader of the 1950s and 1960s. He was born Malcolm Little on May 19, 1925, in Omaha, Nebraska. Malcolm had a difficult childhood. He dropped out of school after the eighth grade. As a young man, he moved to Boston, became involved in crime, and went to prison. There, he learned of a group called the Nation of Islam, an African American movement and organization that challenged white supremacy and promoted black nationalism.*

*Little joined the Nation of Islam in 1952 and gave up his last name because he believed that slaveholders had given it to his ancestors. He replaced it with an X. The X stood for his unknown African family name.*

*Malcolm X was a gifted speaker who gained many followers but also made many enemies. He inspired pride in African heritage, but his methods for gaining equality were much more radical than those of the civil rights movement. He did not believe nonviolence was the only option.*

*In 1964, he left the Nation of Islam and helped found the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU). A secular organization, the OAAU aimed to promote black Americans' self-determination and help them reconnect with their African heritage and achieve economic independence.*

*Some members of the Nation of Islam were not happy with the circumstances under which he had left. On February 21, 1965, he was speaking in New York City when he was shot and killed. Three members of the Nation of Islam were convicted of his murder.*

Maya got to know and admire both of these men. She believed that both of them were dedicated to the cause of improving the lives of African Americans. In addition to supporting both leaders, Maya continued to take part in demonstrations, fundraising, and letter writing for the cause of civil rights.

One day, after hearing a South African freedom fighter speak, Maya came to understand that even on their home continent of Africa, black people were fighting for their freedom. She became interested in African politics and learned of the segregation system in South Africa called *apartheid*. During this time, she met a South African freedom fighter named Vusumzi Make. They became engaged, and Maya agreed to move to Africa.

***Apartheid***

*From the 1950s to the early 1990s in South Africa,* apartheid *(apartness) was a system that kept white and nonwhite people separated. South Africa's population is mostly nonwhite, but for many years, the government was controlled by white people.*

*Apartheid divided South Africans into four groups: white, Bantu (black), Colored (of mixed descent), and Asian. The policy created separate areas in cities for each group. Members of a group were not allowed to live, operate businesses, or own land outside of their area. Under laws known as* pass laws, *people of color had to carry passes while in white areas.*

*Other laws set up separate schools and restricted the types of jobs that people of color could have.*

*Many people in South Africa—mainly black but some white—protested apartheid. The protests sometimes turned violent. In 1990–91, in response to the protests, the South African government ended most of the apartheid laws, and a new constitution went into effect in 1994. Apartheid was over, but its effects remained.*

In 1961, Maya traveled with Guy to Cairo, Egypt, where her fiancé had found them a place to live. Guy attended high school, and Maya found work at a news magazine and continued writing. Sadly, Maya's relationship with Mr. Make did not last. When it ended, she and Guy headed to the country of Ghana, on the west coast of the continent, where Guy planned to attend college.

Tragically, soon after they arrived in Accra, Ghana, Guy was involved in a terrible car accident. For two months, Maya visited him every day in the hospital. She found a job as an administrator at the University of Ghana in Accra, along with some journalism work on the side. When Guy recovered, he enrolled in the same university.

Mother and son felt at home in Ghana. They found friendships among a close-knit group of Ghanaians

and American expatriates. Maya wore African clothes and learned to speak Fante. Everyone thought she was Ghanaian. When she told them she was American, they said, "Aah, a child who has returned home."

In the spring of 1964, Malcolm X paid a visit to Accra. Maya got to know Malcolm on a personal level. She saw that he was a charming man who could laugh at himself and loved his family. When Malcolm returned to the United States, they corresponded by letter. He asked her if she would become the coordinator of his new group, the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), upon her return.

After four years in Africa, Maya decided that it was time to go home. Africa had brought her closer to understanding herself and other human beings. But she was ready to make a difference at home. When she made her rounds to say goodbye to her Ghanaian friends, they used the traditional Fante phrase that let her know they hoped to see her again: "*Ko ne bra*." Go and come.

# 12

## I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

Maya returned to the United States on February 19, 1965, without nineteen-year-old Guy. He had decided to stay in Ghana. When she landed in New York, Maya spoke to Malcolm X on the phone. He was happy to hear that she would accept the position as coordinator of OAAU. She would start work in a few weeks. First, she wanted to visit her mother and Bailey, who was out of prison. Two days later, in San Francisco, Maya received a call from a friend.

Maya's friend told her that Malcolm X was dead.

The shock of Malcolm's murder demoralized Maya. Nothing seemed to make sense anymore. The OAAU was no longer an option, and her future seemed uncertain. Bailey was living in Hawaii, and he encouraged his sister to move there. In Hawaii, Maya went back to singing in nightclubs. Then she moved to Los Angeles, where she once again took up writing and a little acting. By 1967, Maya was ready to return to New York.

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**demoralized:** weakened one's spirit and resolve

Back in New York, Maya devoted as much time as she could to writing plays and poetry. One evening, she took the time to attend a special event at the famed Carnegie Hall. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was the keynote speaker.

Dr. King's soaring words and musical cadence brought the audience to its feet. After his presentation, Dr. King found Maya and asked her if she would help the SCLC plan a march in Washington, D.C. The march would demand new laws to reduce poverty in America. Maya agreed to help, but she advised Dr. King that she would start after her fortieth birthday: April 4, 1968. On the day of her birthday, Maya was busily preparing for a big dinner party when she got the horrible, unbelievable news that Martin Luther King Jr. had been assassinated.

Maya became so overwhelmed with grief that even walking seemed like a chore. She didn't want to talk to anyone. Once again, Maya had lost her voice. She retreated from life, from family, from friends. Alone, she looked for answers.

Maya's close friends knew that she had become mute as a child. They did not want that to happen again. Her voice was too important. So they checked on her every day. But it was one friend in particular, writer James Baldwin, who brought her out of her gloom. He reminded Maya

**cadence:** rhythm

how black people had survived. He spoke to her of the importance of words in African Americans' struggle for freedom. They had written survival into their poems and their songs. They had spoken it into folktales. Survival meant lifting their own spirits, using their own words, telling their own stories.

***James Baldwin***

*James Baldwin was an African American novelist, best known for his fictionalized autobiography,* Go Tell It on the Mountain. *Also a playwright, poet, and essayist, Baldwin wrote about the struggles of African Americans. He was born in Harlem on August 2, 1924. As a young man, he lived in Greenwich Village, an artistic neighborhood of New York City, to focus on writing. In 1948, unhappy with the racism he faced in the United States, he moved to Paris, France.*

*In 1957, Baldwin returned to the United States and joined the civil rights movement. He became good friends with Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. After the assassinations of his friends, Baldwin returned to Europe, where he remained until his death in France on December 1, 1987.*

James Baldwin's words awoke Maya. She returned to writing with renewed passion. She wrote poems. She wrote plays. She produced, wrote, and narrated a ten-part documentary television series, *Blacks, Blues, Black!*, that traces the origins of African American culture—games, music, food, dance—to Africa. The series was well received. People were taking notice of Maya Angelou.

Maya received a phone call from an editor at Random House, a publishing company. He asked her if she might be interested in writing her autobiography. Maya responded, "No, thank you." She was a poet and a playwright. It would take several more phone calls before Maya would agree to write *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

When the book was released in 1969, it became an instant bestseller. In it, Maya recounts her life from the time she and Bailey arrived in Stamps to the birth of her son, Guy. Later made into a television movie, it was one of the first coming-of-age stories written by an African American woman. The title refers to a poem by one of Maya's favorite poets, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, titled "Sympathy":

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,—
When he beats his bars and he would be free;
It is not a carol of joy or glee,
But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings—
I know why the caged bird sings!

Many Americans, especially black women, related to Maya's ability to celebrate and embrace life despite the

pains and disappointments she had experienced. Awards, praise, fame, and fortune rained down upon Maya, who, at age forty-one, had truly found her voice. More than fifty years later, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is still required reading in many high school and college courses.

Maya went on to write six more autobiographies, examining different periods of her extraordinary life. She included the good and the bad, the tragic and the joyful. She wanted her readers to know that one does not need to be perfect to succeed in life.

Poetry, however, remained Maya's favorite genre. And it was poetry that led to the defining moment of her phenomenal career. Bill Clinton, the forty-second president of the United States, asked Maya to write and recite a poem for his inauguration. It would be only the second time in U.S. history that a poet was invited to speak at a presidential inauguration.

On January 20, 1993, Maya looked out upon a sea of people. The silent little girl had become a woman whose voice would be heard by millions of people around the world.

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**phenomenal:** extraordinary
**inauguration:** a ceremony to introduce a new officeholder

What would Momma say if she were here? *You be a good girl now. You hear? Don't you make people think I didn't raise you right.* And her mother, who had passed only two years before—what would she say? *Give it everything you've got.*

Maya knew that Guy, who sat in the audience, and Bailey were proud of her as she began reading her poem, titled "On the Pulse of Morning":

A Rock, A River, A Tree

Hosts to species long since departed . . .

She spoke of her desire to confront and overcome the wrongs of the nation's past. She expressed her belief that with this new president, a new day was beginning—a day when people of all races, nationalities, and identities might live in a just world, a world of peace and unity.

She ended her poem with the common greeting of a brand-new day: a simple, hopeful "Good morning."

# AFTERWORD
## A Teacher Who Could Write

Maya Angelou had many productive years left after she recited "On the Pulse of Morning" to the world. She continued writing. She spoke across the country and around the world. She received countless honors and awards, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2011. However, what brought Maya the greatest joy was teaching.

In 1982, at the age of fifty-four, Maya had been invited to become a professor of American studies at Wake Forest University in North Carolina. She agreed to try it for one year, and in that year, she discovered that she loved teaching. When teaching, she used all of her talents. She "swayed and danced, bounced and pranced," as one college dean recalled. She sang. She read and recited passages from the world's great books and plays. She gave all of herself.

In her last autobiography, *Mom & Me & Mom*, she wrote, "I had misunderstood my calling. I had thought that I was a writer who could teach." But after that first year, she discovered that she was "a teacher who could write." She would spend the rest of her life at Wake Forest, doing what she loved.

Maya Angelou passed away on May 28, 2014, at the age of eighty-six. She left behind a legacy of words. As long as her books are read and her poetry is recited, her voice will never be silenced.

# Discussion Questions

1. Momma owned the only black-owned store in the town of Stamps. What was special about the store to Maya and to the people of the town?

2. How did Marguerite get the name "Maya"? What was special about Maya's relationship with her brother? How did their relationship change throughout their lives? How does it feel when your relationship with someone changes?

3. When Maya stopped speaking, how did she find her voice again? Are there people or things (books, poetry, music, etc.) that give you the confidence to speak up?

4. Describe Maya's eighth-grade graduation. What about it was exciting for Maya, and what about it was upsetting?

5. Consider some of Maya's jobs—streetcar conductor, dancer, singer, actor, writer, professor. What did Maya learn from working these different jobs? How were they similar or different?

6. Consider how Maya became a writer. What is more important when following a dream: your own desire to fulfill that dream, or the support of others who want you to fulfill it? Explain.

7. Pick one of the many famous people from the story (a poet, a writer, an actor, a leader, etc.) whom Maya admired, and explain why you think Maya was drawn to them. Examples include Charles Dickens, William Shakespeare, James Weldon Johnson, Edgar Allen Poe, James Baldwin, Martin Luther King Jr., Godfrey Cambridge, Malcolm X, etc.

8. Think about the many challenges Maya faced in her life. What were some of them, and what were their results? Are there any challenges that make us stronger?

9. How did Maya come to write her first autobiography? Why did she name it *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings?*

10. What aspect of Maya's life do you identify with most? Is there any part of her life that helps you appreciate your own life or that helps you recognize your own gifts? Are there obstacles you have had to overcome in your life?

11. What is your passion? Do you think you will follow that passion your entire life—or perhaps discover a new passion?

12. Find a quote or poem or other piece of writing by Maya that speaks to you and explain why.

# Meet the Author

**Glenda Armand** was a teacher and school librarian for many years. Now she fulfills her love of reading, learning, writing, and teaching by devoting most of her time to writing while teaching part-time. She enjoys writing stories that inspire children to dream big.

For the Voices in History Biography Series, Ms. Armand has written about Maya Angelou, James Lafayette, and Harriet Tubman.

Ms. Armand is also the author of a number of picture book biographies, including *All Aboard the Schooltrain: A Little Story from the Great Migration* and *Black-Eyed Peas and Hoghead Cheese: A Story of Food, Family, and Freedom*. Her latest releases include *Ice Cream Man:*

*How Augustus Jackson Made a Sweet Treat Better* and *The Night Before Freedom: A Juneteenth Story*.

When not writing or practicing the piano, Ms. Armand tends a garden full of roses and succulents.

Drop by her website at *glenda-armand.com*.

# Meet the Illustrator

**Natalie Riolfi** is an Argentinian-American artist, born and raised in Miami, Florida. Brought up by Argentinian parents in Miami constantly exposed her to colorful art and music and an eccentric community. She enrolled in Design and Architecture Senior High, where she focused on industrial design. While practicing a very academic genre of illustration, she also fell into portraiture through traditional painting and drawing. After some time, her focus shifted toward creating comics and illustrations. Shortly after graduating high school, Natalie moved to New York City and received

a BFA in Cartooning from the School of Visual Arts. At SVA, she solidified an interest and practice in book arts and book design. Her current stories focus on cultural identity and culture shock, inspired by the change experienced when she moved from Miami to New York City. She explores the conflict between confidence and insecurity of representing her experience growing up in a Latin household, in a Latin city. She aims to reconcile the cultural and generational gap between herself, her family, and the people around her.

# Credits

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