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Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

*I Know Why the
Caged Bird Sings*

by Maya Angelou

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I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

T o T h e T e a c h e r

In order to allow the teacher maximum flexibility in his or her approach, we have grouped the prompts by sections. The teacher may, therefore, assign specific prompts or allow the students to select one or more prompts from each section

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Response Journal

To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

Class Record Sheet

[illegible]

Name_____ Section_____ Date_____

[illegible]

CHAPTER ONE

1. After agreeing to supervise the children, the train porter leaves Marguerite and Bailey alone on the train. Put yourself in Marguerite or Bailey's place. What are you thinking or feeling when the porter leaves?
2. Marguerite remembers the early mornings at the store and her grandmother's morning prayers. Can you remember a beautiful early morning scene you experienced? If you can, describe what the morning was like and how you felt about it.
3. The cotton workers have a difficult life. Have you witnessed or heard about a job that you think is a difficult or unpleasant way to make a living? What can you do to avoid working at such a job?

CHAPTER TWO

4. Momma makes a point of telling everyone she meets that Uncle Willie "wasn't born that way." Imagine you are Uncle Willie; describe how you feel hearing her explain this problem.
5. Uncle Willie hides his disability behind the counter and sometimes pretends to strangers that he isn't crippled. Assume you are Willie, and Marguerite asks you why you pretend like that. Write the answer you give her.

CHAPTER THREE

6. In Stamps, it is assumed that black people will go to heaven since they suffer here on earth. They endure their lives with the promise of an eternal reward. What are your thoughts or feelings on the idea that having a difficult time while alive assures a place in heaven?

Response Journal

7. The sheriff angers Marguerite. She does not think he deserves credit from God for trying to warn Willie of the possible trouble. Write a letter to God, from Marguerite, explaining why you are angry.

CHAPTER FOUR

8. The author mentions Mr. Elroy as an example of a successful black man. In your mind, what makes any man or woman a success? What plan would you follow to be that kind of success?
9. Bailey is Marguerite's hero. Is there a real person in your life you admire and want to be like? Relate the heroic qualities of this person.
10. The white people Marguerite encounters are almost like foreigners. She is interested in them and their strange lives. Assume you are visiting from China. What things might a visitor from China find strange about your life?

CHAPTER FIVE

11. It is insulting to Mrs. Henderson when the white people call her Annie. Can you think of a time when you or a friend felt deeply insulted? Describe how you felt.
12. Momma sings to herself whenever she faces a difficult situation. How do you feel about this as a way to handle a difficult situation?
13. Marguerite tells Momma she loves her and is proud of her by making a large heart in the dirt of the driveway. In what ways, other than words and physical expressions, have you seen someone show love to another person?

CHAPTER SIX

14. Because of his actions, the children are disgusted by the Reverend Thomas. Write a letter of advice from the children to Reverend Thomas on how to behave when he is a guest in another person's home.
15. Sister Monroe behaves outrageously because she wants everyone to be impressed with her devotion. Tell about someone you know who tries to impress others through behavior.
16. Marguerite and Bailey begin to laugh in church. Have you ever felt the urge to laugh in an inappropriate situation? Describe what happened.

CHAPTER SEVEN

17. Momma tries to teach the children how to deal safely with white folks. As a parent, what advice would you give your children about dealing with other people who are different?

CHAPTER EIGHT

18. In Marguerite's world, when blacks give to blacks, it is a "true gift" because the item is needed by both. Write about a "true gift" you have received or witnessed another receive.
19. Bailey and Marguerite are upset by the Christmas gifts from their parents. Write a note from Marguerite to her mother telling her exactly how she felt about receiving the gifts.
20. Bailey hopes his mother will come to see them. He wants her in his life. Assume you have a friend who is separated from his mother at the holidays. What advice would you give him or her?

CHAPTER NINE

21. The children leave their home in Stamps to travel with their father to St. Louis. There they will be staying with their mother. Write about a time in your life when you moved to a different place. What was the best or worst thing about the move?
22. Marguerite is confused and amazed by the behavior of her parents and the way in which their personalities differ from hers. Are there things about your parents' personalities that amaze you? Explain what these things are and why they surprise you.
23. Daddy Bailey tries to talk to Marguerite and make friends with her but is not really successful. Write a letter from Daddy Bailey to Marguerite expressing how he feels when she doesn't respond to his efforts.

CHAPTER TEN

24. Uncle Tommy tells Marguerite, "Don't worry cause you ain't pretty. Plenty pretty women I seen digging ditches or worse. You smart. I swear to God, I rather you have a good mind than a cute behind." What is your reaction to Uncle Tommy's comment?
25. Marguerite says, "But what mother and daughter understand each other, or even have the sympathy for each other's lack of understanding?" Write about a time in your life when your mother didn't understand you. How did you try to help her understand your point of view?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

26. Marguerite experiences sexual abuse by Mr. Freeman. If this were to happen to one of your friends, how would you provide comfort? What advice would you give?

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

27. Some people say that if you never had the experience you can't give advice; others say it is frequently the outside observer who can give the best advice. What is your opinion on giving advice?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

28. In the trial of Mr. Freeman, Marguerite lies on the witness stand. Assume she keeps a daily diary and write her entry for that day, describing how she feels about lying.
29. If you understand why Marguerite stopped talking, explain it to a friend who doesn't understand Marguerite's behavior.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

30. Marguerite learns from the people in Stamps to "be satisfied with life's inequities." For example, she learns to accept the unfairness of the rape. What do you suppose are inequities in life that you have learned or must learn to accept if you are to be happy?
31. Marguerite is described by the community as "tender-hearted" or sensitive. Do you know someone who is "tender hearted?" Are they understood or misunderstood by others?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

32. Write a letter to Mrs. Flowers from a grown-up Marguerite expressing why she admired Mrs. Flowers and how the woman helped shape her life.

Response Journal

33. Momma embarrasses Marguerite by making her take off her dress in front of Mrs. Flowers. Can you remember a time when a member of your family embarrassed you? Can you remember being a young child and feeling embarrassed by your parents? Describe the incident, including why you were embarrassed.
34. Mrs. Flowers helps Marguerite understand that sometimes a person can be illiterate but still very intelligent. Can you think of someone you know or have heard about who lacks any formal education but is very intelligent and successful? Describe this person.
35. Marguerite is punished for using the phrase, “by the way.” While the phrase is a common expression among the white people, the black people interpret it as using the Lord’s name in vain. Have your parents ever gotten upset over something you said, acceptable among your peers but offensive to them? Did they listen to your explanation?

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

36. Marguerite tries to understand her employer, Mrs. Cullinan, who is very bigoted. Do you know anyone well who is prejudiced? Why do you suppose that person is that way?

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

37. Bailey is late returning from town, and Momma is worried. Write about a time you were late coming home. How did your family feel? Did you suffer any consequences?
38. Bailey brings comic books back for Marguerite. What are some of your favorite comics? Why do you prefer these over others?

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

39. On the way home, Bailey plays chicken with a train. Marguerite is terrified. Suppose you are walking home with a friend and he or she decides to do something dangerous. What would you do or say to stop it?

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

40. The revival meeting is a joyous experience for all the different churches in the black community. Can you relate a time when you attended an enjoyable community event?
41. The sermon excites the people because it suggests that they are almost guaranteed a place in heaven since they truly understand the idea of charity. Write a letter to God asking him if he really admits only poor, downtrodden people into heaven.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

42. The black community places a lot of responsibility on Joe Louis to win the heavyweight title. He is fighting for the honor of the entire race. Write a dialogue between Joe Louis and his trainer in which the trainer is trying to persuade him to train even harder for the upcoming title fight.

CHAPTER TWENTY

43. Louise quickly becomes Marguerite's best friend. What qualities do you look for in a friend? Why is this person fun to be with?
44. Explain to Marquerite what being a Valentine is supposed to mean.

Response Journal

45. Once Marguerite trusts that Tommy likes her, she gets the giggles every time he is around. Have you ever behaved foolishly around someone you wanted to impress? Describe what you did.
46. Louise advises Marguerite not to answer the Valentine and Tommy will go away. What advise would you offer a friend in the same situation?

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

47. What do you think of Joyce and what she does to Bailey? If you were Marguerite, what would you say to her?
48. The activities in the Captain Marvel tent are a secret from Momma and Uncle Willie. Suppose Momma discovers what Bailey is doing. Write a dialogue between Momma and Uncle Willie in which she is trying to convince him to have a talk with Bailey.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

49. The children are frightened by Brother Taylor's story about talking to his wife's ghost. How do you feel about ghosts and ghost stories? Write about a time when you had become that involved by a ghost story.
50. Marguerite understands the inevitability of death for the first time at Mrs. Taylor's funeral. Describe a time you attended a funeral, and it caused you to think about life and death.
51. During the ghost story, Marguerite thinks the familiar rooms behind the store are suddenly spooky. Relate a time you felt scared in your own home.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

52. Momma's wisdom at solving Mr. Taylor's problem clears away the ghostly feel of the house. As a parent, what advice would you give to your children to make them feel safe?

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

53. Marguerite admires Henry Reed. He is popular with adults and children. Do you know anyone like this? What special qualities does this have?
54. The song "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing" reminds the children of how much the black race has already endured. Marguerite is proud to be black. Write a note from Marguerite to Henry describing her appreciation of his graduation speech.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

55. Marguerite suffers with a toothache and needs to go to a dentist. Is there a trip to the dentist that you remember? Relate how you felt, the sounds and smells in the office, and the resolution of your problem.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

56. Marguerite says that she uses books to escape the realities of her life and that these are experiences she will never lose. Have you ever escaped from reality when reading a book? Can you think of anything the book did besides help you escape reality?

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

57. When in the car with their mother, Marguerite and Bailey realize that their mother is nervous around them and that they have the power to upset her. What kind of power do you have over your parents? Do you use your power fairly or unfairly?
58. The children's mother shoots her partner because he calls her a name. The author tells about this incident as a way of explaining Momma's attitude. The story doesn't include any information about what the police do or if she is punished. Speculate on what happened and how she avoided jail time.
59. Marguerite and Bailey are introduced to different cultures by going to different restaurants and tasting their food. We have all had the experience of being served something strange at someone's house or in a restaurant. Relate a time when you were served something unusual.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

60. Miss Kirwin is Marguerite's favorite teacher. What qualities does the ideal teacher or your favorite teacher possess?

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

61. Marguerite is exposed to colorful characters who tell her tales of their adventures. Can you think of a story told to you by an older relative or acquaintance that was interesting, but may not have been true?
62. Marguerite lives in two worlds. She knows how to speak the school language and then slip into the colloquial slang around the neighborhood. If you or someone you know does this, explain to someone who doesn't understand why having two languages is necessary.

CHAPTER THIRTY

63. Marguerite doesn't get along with her stepmother. Write about an experience in your life or in a friend's life in which the stepmother and children do, or do not, get along.
64. Baily Jr. seems to enjoy the conflict between Marguerite and her stepmother. Write a dialogue between Marguerite and her father in which she explains how she feels about his attitude.
65. In Mexico, Marguerite sees another side of her father. She sees him with "new eyes." Write about a time in your life when an adult surprised you, and you saw him or her with "new eyes."
66. Marguerite must drive for the first time when her father passes out in the back seat of the car. Have you ever experienced the situation in which, when a job had to be done, you or someone else stepped forward because there was no one else to do it?
67. Marguerite is angry that her father has recovered so quickly and disappointed that he doesn't appreciate the greatness of her achievement. Have you ever done something noteworthy, only to find it totally unappreciated by your friends and family? Do you remember how you felt?

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

68. Marguerite starts a fight with Dolores by slapping her, then receives a knife wound. Have you ever been involved in or observed a fight in which the fight escalated just because no one knew how to stop it?
69. When Marguerite decides to run away from her home, what are her reasons for leaving?

Response Journal

70. What advice would you give to a friend who is planning to run away?

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

71. Marguerite stays with the homeless children for a month. Speculate on what her father is doing all of that time.
72. Why do you think Marguerite's mother doesn't ask more questions about her daughter's lack of luggage?

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

73. When Marguerite goes to visit Bailey, she discovers he has already made up with their mother. Write a dialogue between Bailey and his mother in which they both decide it is best for him to get a job on the railroad.
74. Bailey's mother comes through for him and helps him get a job. She doesn't hold a grudge about the fight. Write about a time in your life when you had a fight with a friend or family member. How did you resolve your differences?

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

75. When Marguerite sets out to get "an impossible job" as a conductor on the street cars, her mother encourages her to try. Do you feel that your parents encourage you to try new or difficult things?
76. Through persistence, Marguerite eventually gets her job. However, the hours are difficult, and the job doesn't live up to her expectations. Can you remember a time when something you wanted desperately didn't live up to your expectations, once it was obtained?

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

77. Marguerite lies on her application because she won't be qualified for the job if she tells the truth. Can you think of an example from your life, reading, or television when something good came from lying?
78. Marguerite skips classes for a while. Have you or anyone you know ever skipped school? A danger in skipping school is that skipping can become a bad habit that's hard to break. What's your opinion?

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

79. When Marguerite has fears about her body, she goes to her mother, and her mother explains the body's changes. If you had an embarrassing problem, where would you turn?

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

80. Marguerite's mother and stepfather accept the baby without condemning Marguerite. How do you think your family might react if someone in your family were in a similar situation?
81. In the last chapter Mother whispers, "See, you don't have to think about doing the right thing. If you're for the right thing, then you do it without thinking." What do you think of this passage?

WRAP UP

82. After finishing this book, what do you think was good or bad about it?
83. Is there anything that particularly pleased or upset you in this book?

Response Journal

84. Some of this story is written in dialect and tries to capture the way in which the people really speak. Some people enjoy reading dialect while others don't. How do you feel about it?
85. Although a serious book, there are passages that are humorous. To a classmate who does not find anything humorous, point out some humor in the story.
86. Many novels that have young people as the main characters are in the Coming of Age genre. The term indicates that, in the course of the novel, the character moves from immaturity to maturity. In what ways does this description fit this book?
87. Consider the adult females who appear in this novel. Can you draw any generalizations about the adults? Are they like or unlike the adults in other books you've read? Explain.

Test

1. Which of the following events from the story best illustrates the oppression of the black community?
 - A. The sheriff's message to Uncle Willie
 - B. Marguerite and Bailey's reception on the arrival in Stamps, AR
 - C. Mrs. Flowers' behavior during the revival meeting
 - D. Bailey's job on the railroad
2. The white folks are disrespectful to Momma when they
 - A. address her as Annie.
 - B. borrow money from her and don't pay interest.
 - C. rent her land for farming.
 - D. compliment her on her sewing.
3. Bailey and Marguerite are upset by their Christmas gifts because
 - A. Marguerite isn't old enough to drink tea and doesn't like the tea set.
 - B. the gifts are a painful reminder that their mother doesn't seem to want them.
 - C. they haven't sent any gifts to their mother.
 - D. the picture of their father is a stupid gift.
4. The children's St. Louis grandmother is
 - A. of mixed racial heritage.
 - B. a pince-nez.
 - C. a powerful precinct captain.
 - D. upset because all six of her children are mean.
 - E. Both A and C.
5. Marguerite stops talking to everyone except Bailey because
 - A. she is embarrassed about the rape and tired of the nosy questions.
 - B. he is the only one who truly listens to her opinions.
 - C. she blames her mother for not protecting her from Mr. Freeman.
 - D. she believes they may die also if she talks to them.

Response Journal

6. The stereotypical picture of the cotton pickers in Chapter One upsets the author because
 - A. the people are presented as being cruel and greedy.
 - B. it makes fun of all black people.
 - C. it does not convey the reality of the situation.
 - D. it makes generalizations about a whole race of people based on a limited number.

7. The black church Marguerite attends teaches that black people will be going to Heaven because
 - A. they attend church regularly and don't use the Lord's name in vain.
 - B. God is black and favors them.
 - C. charity is simple, poor, and plain, and black people understand charity.
 - D. people with tough lives automatically go to Heaven.

8. Marguerite is uncomfortable at Mrs. Taylor's funeral because she
 - A. realizes the only way to know how it feels to die is to actually experience death.
 - B. survives on the streets after running away from her father.
 - C. learns to care for her infant son.
 - D. believes she is destined to die before her graduation ceremony.

9. Henry Reed leads the audience in the Negro National Anthem because
 - A. he resents its being skipped to accommodate the white speaker's schedule.
 - B. the speaker degrades the students by suggesting the only avenue of success open to them is in athletic endeavors.
 - C. he wants to start trouble.
 - D. Both A and B.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

10. Marguerite likes Miss Kirwin because
 - A. she doesn't try to be a liberal.
 - B. she makes her give up the "emotive" voice by doing pantomime for a year.
 - C. she remembers her years after graduation and spends the whole afternoon reminiscing about old times.
 - D. English is her favorite subject.
11. Black people of the author's acquaintance admire someone who scrubs floors and buys designer shoes because
 - A. the type of dedication needed to achieve any acquisition boosts the entire race's worth.
 - B. it shows the white people that they can look good, too.
 - C. clothing, next to cars, is the best reflection of status in the community.
 - D. those are the only jobs open to them.
12. The children in the junkyard community
 - A. live off of handouts.
 - B. each have their own cars, even in the rain.
 - C. teach Marguerite tolerance for other races.
 - D. accept Marguerite into their group as long as she earns money.
13. Marguerite decides to get a job as a conductorette
 - A. even though she lies on the application about her age.
 - B. despite the fact they don't hire blacks.
 - C. because she can see herself in the blue serge suit.
 - D. A, B, and C
 - E. Both B and C
14. Of white charity, the narrator tells us that
 - A. it always has strings attached.
 - B. it never amounts to very much.
 - C. it is only the giving away of things white people no longer need.
 - D. A, B, and C

Response Journal

15. Marguerite gets pregnant
- A. because she wants a baby to love.
 - B. and manages to hide her pregnancy for eight-and-one-half months.
 - C. to spite her mother because she goes to Alaska.
 - D. because she can't get a boyfriend to love her.
16. Which event suggests that people who want to do the right thing will do the right thing?
- A. Dr. Lincoln gives Mother ten dollars to take Marguerite to the black dentist.
 - B. The sheriff warns Uncle Willie that the boys will be looking for a black man to lynch.
 - C. Marguerite discovers her natural maternal instinct and overcomes the fear of hurting her new baby
 - D. Mr. Freeman is kicked to death for assaulting Marguerite.
17. The author suggests that when Mrs. Cullinan calls Marguerite by the name of Mary it reveals Mrs. Cullinan's
- A. warm, personal interest in and knowledge of the girl.
 - B. lack of interest and knowledge of her real name.
 - C. intent to insult and humiliate Marguerite.
 - D. complete ignorance or lack of interest in the importance that black people attach to their proper names.
18. At the time Marguerite is struggling to get the job as a trolley conductress, her mother
- A. encourages her to forget that low-paying job and get a high-paying defense job.
 - B. tells her to be realistic and not fight windmills that she can't knock down.
 - C. encourages her and supports her effort.
 - D. tries to convince Marguerite that she should get back to school and finish her education before she tries to change the world.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

19. Who said: "Oh Mizeriz Coleman, how is your son? I saw him the other day and he looked sick enough to die"?
- A. Uncle Willie
 - B. Bailey
 - C. Bertha Flowers
 - D. Mr. Freeman
 - E. Mr. Johnson
20. Who said: "I'll have to kill Bailey"?
- A. Miss Kirwin
 - B. Mr. McElroy
 - C. Louise
 - D. Marguerite
 - E. Mr. Freeman

Test
Student Answer Sheet

Name: _____

1. _____

11. _____

2. _____

12. _____

3. _____

13. _____

4. _____

14. _____

5. _____

15. _____

6. _____

16. _____

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17. _____

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18. _____

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19. _____

10. _____

20. _____

Response Journal

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Test
Answer Key

1. A

2. A

3. B

4. E

5. D

6. C

7. C

8. A

9. D

10. A

11. A

12. C

13. D

14. C

15. B

16. C

17. D

18. C

19. B

20. E

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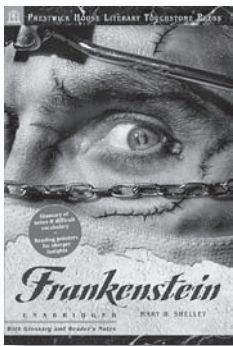
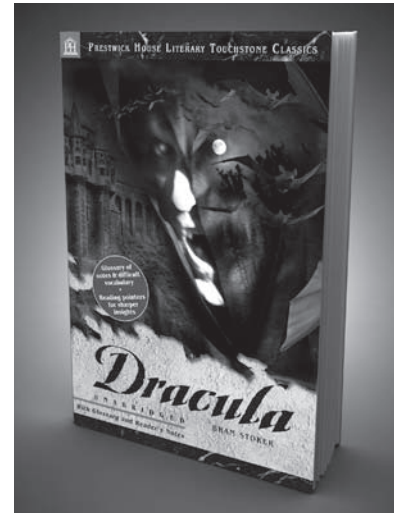
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