

WIDE RAINBOW LESSONS: Poet Maya Angelou

ARTIST INTRO:

Maya Angelou was an acclaimed American poet, storyteller, activist, and autobiographer. She had a broad career as a singer, dancer, actress, composer, and Hollywood's first female black director, but became most famous as a writer, editor, essayist, playwright, and poet. She was respected as a spokesperson for black people and women, and her works have been considered a defense of black culture. Angelou's most famous work, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) is an account of her childhood in the Jim Crow South. During her lifetime Angelou recited her poems in front of crowds like performances tracing back to African-American oral traditions.

MAYA ANGELOU:



WORKSHOP:

Let's listen, read, & share Maya Angelou's empowering poetry with each other.

- 1. Listen to Maya Angelou recite her poetry*
- 2. Read, download, and print free attached poems*
- 3. Let's share our thoughts, feelings, and ideas about these poems with each other*
- 4. Write a poem inspired by or in response to one of Maya Angelou's poems*

MATERIALS:

Attached free poems to print & downloadable poems.

Links for recordings/videos by Maya Angelou:

Still I Rise

<https://vimeo.com/5453316>

The Mask

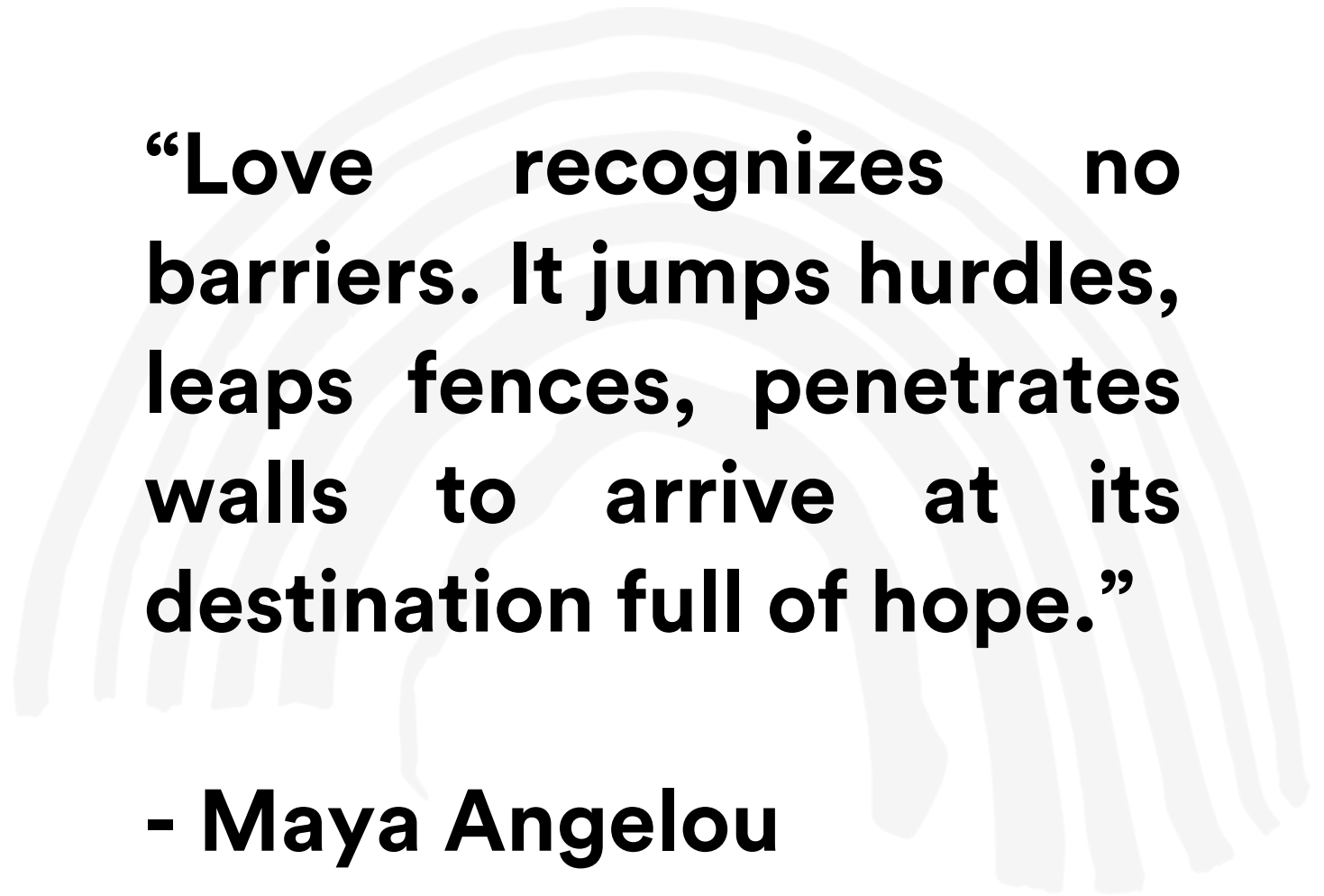
<https://youtu.be/UT9y9HFHpU0>

Phenomenal Woman

https://youtu.be/VeFfhH83_RE

On the Pulse of the Morning

<https://youtu.be/59xGmHzxtZ4>



“Love recognizes no barriers. It jumps hurdles, leaps fences, penetrates walls to arrive at its destination full of hope.”

- Maya Angelou



FOLLOW UP:

Which poem could you most relate to?

How did it make you feel?

What do you think of Maya Angelou's voice? Her writing? Her story?

If you could share any of these poems which one would you like to pass on to a friend, family member, classmate or even stranger?

**Wide Rainbow is a 501c3 contemporary art after school program.
Providing access to art, artists, and arts education.**

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Caged Bird

By Maya Angelou

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 bird
sings of freedom.

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

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

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

Still I Rise

By Maya Angelou

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

Phenomenal Woman

By Maya Angelou

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.
I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size
But when I start to tell them,
They think I'm telling lies.
I say,
It's in the reach of my arms,
The span of my hips,
The stride of my step,
The curl of my lips.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

I walk into a room
Just as cool as you please,
And to a man,
The fellows stand or
Fall down on their knees.
Then they swarm around me,
A hive of honey bees.
I say,
It's the fire in my eyes,
And the flash of my teeth,
The swing in my waist,
And the joy in my feet.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

Men themselves have wondered
What they see in me.
They try so much
But they can't touch
My inner mystery.
When I try to show them,
They say they still can't see.
I say,
It's in the arch of my back,
The sun of my smile,
The ride of my breasts,
The grace of my style.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

Now you understand
Just why my head's not bowed.
I don't shout or jump about
Or have to talk real loud.
When you see me passing,
It ought to make you proud.
I say,
It's in the click of my heels,
The bend of my hair,
the palm of my hand,
The need for my care.
'Cause I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

On the Pulse of Morning (excerpt)

By Maya Angelou

A Rock, A River, A Tree
Hosts to species long since departed,
Marked the mastodon,
The dinosaur, who left dried tokens
Of their sojourn here
On our planet floor,
Any broad alarm of their hastening doom
Is lost in the gloom of dust and ages.

But today, the Rock cries out to us, clearly, forcefully,
Come, you may stand upon my
Back and face your distant destiny,
But seek no haven in my shadow,
I will give you no hiding place down here.

You, created only a little lower than
The angels, have crouched too long in
The bruising darkness
Have lain too long
Facedown in ignorance,
Your mouths spilling words
Armed for slaughter.

The Rock cries out to us today,
You may stand upon me,
But do not hide your face.

[...]

The Mask

By Maya Angelou

We wear the mask that grins and lies.
It shades our cheeks and hides our eyes.
This debt we pay to human guile
With torn and bleeding hearts . . .
We smile and mouth the myriad subtleties.
Why should the world think otherwise
In counting all our tears and sighs.
Nay let them only see us while
We wear the mask.

We smile but oh my God
Our tears to thee from tortured souls arise
And we sing Oh Baby doll, now we sing . . .
The clay is vile beneath our feet
And long the mile
But let the world think otherwise.
We wear the mask.

When I think about myself
I almost laugh myself to death.
My life has been one great big joke!
A dance that's walked a song that's spoke.
I laugh so hard HA! HA! I almos' choke
When I think about myself.

Seventy years in these folks' world
The child I works for calls me girl
I say "HA! HA! HA! Yes ma'am!"
For workin's sake
I'm too proud to bend and
Too poor to break
So . . . I laugh! Until my stomach ache
When I think about myself.
My folks can make me split my side
I laugh so hard, HA! HA! I nearly died
The tales they tell sound just like lying
They grow the fruit but eat the rind.
Hmm huh! I laugh uhuh huh huh . . .
Until I start to cry when I think about myself
And my folks and the children.

My fathers sit on benches,
Their flesh count every plank,
The slats leave dents of darkness
Deep in their withered flank.
And they gnarled like broken candles,
All waxed and burned profound.
They say, but sugar, it was our submission
that made your world go round.

There in those pleated faces
I see the auction block
The chains and slavery's coffles
The whip and lash and stock.
My fathers speak in voices
That shred my fact and sound
They say, but sugar, it was our submission
that made your world go round.

They laugh to conceal their crying,
They shuffle through their dreams
They stepped 'n fetched a country
And wrote the blues in screams.
I understand their meaning,
It could an did derive
From living on the edge of death
They kept my race alive
By wearing the mask! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

Maya Angelou adapted the 1896 poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar, "We Wear the Mask," in the following spoken-word poem.

Alone

By Maya Angelou

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

There are some millionaires
With money they can't use Their wives run round like banshees
Their children sing the blues
They've got expensive doctors
To cure their hearts of stone.
But nobody
No, nobody
Can make it out here alone.

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

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

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