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Dramatic interpretation reflection

From the moment our eyes are set on the first page of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, we are brought back in time. We go from the modern world of relative peace and equality to the world of 90 years past, in a time much darker than ours. There, Maya Angelou shows us through her own very eyes, the world we live in today came at a heavy price. Our history is filled with blood and tears. The relative equality we have today is the result of brave people standing up for themselves and everyone they know. Maya Angelou is one of such people. This is one of the first times she decides that she cannot take the injustice anymore; she decides that she must make a stand. For the first time in her life, she rises above the ignorance and hate, to eventually affect millions of people worldwide. That is why this chapter is important.

Out of the thirty-six chapters each repeatedly showing the effects of racial inequality almost all of them show the effects of inequality. Like the dentist in chapter 14 refusing to treat Maya saying, “I’d rather stick my hand in a dog’s mouth than in a N-word’s” (Maya Angelou 189). Most of them repeatedly put stress on exactly that: showing the detrimental effects of racial inequality without too much stress on the human resilience needed to survive these inequalities. These chapters are an excellent way to illustrate the simple and pure hate directed at people of different color, that they are worse than dogs in the eyes of the white dentist. But as good as it is these chapters are only one among many others, not a unique chapter that can really show another side of the story.

Chapter 34 tells a simple tale. Maya, upon returning to her mother from Mexico at the age of fifteen, decides it’s due time to get a job. She was rejected under the false assertion that the personnel manager, Mr. Cooper, was gone for the day. Maya did not give up, thrusted into a “honeycomb of determination with apertures for the days to go in and out” (268). Nor did Mr. Cooper, having been “gone” for every day of the three weeks. This elaborate ritual ended when finally, Maya, without any formal interview was given job application papers and was hired as a streetcar conductor.

Upon inspection you will find that her method of resistance or rebellion bears resemblance to Rosa Park’s story. Both through their persistence, were able to break free of the barriers imposed on them by skin color. Not by actively doing something, but by refusing to get up and let the inequal prejudice have its way. Both later achieved their goal, Maya getting a job and Rosa Parks contributing to the civil rights movement that eventually ended segregation. Maya in this chapter has shown and proven that with determination you can overcome anything.

This same chapter is the first chapter in which Maya fights back. Instead of letting Grandma Baxter avenge her, have momma protect her, or even watch Joe louis fight all his challengers. She is the one doing the fighting this time.

In the forging of my speech I chose to remove sections about Mother Dear’s interaction with Maya. I felt that the emphasis placed on the chapter was about Maya’s confrontation with the clerk. This was, I felt what the importance of the chapter derives from. I removed everything peripheral to the main story of Maya at the office. The plot of the chapter is reflected in one of the starting paragraphs, “I had it, the answer came to me in the suddenness of a collision. I would go to work” (264). I attempted to give a speech encapsulating only the key aspects of the story and boiling away all access material like you would with whale fat. An example of material that does not do much to further the plot are mother dear’s anecdotes “life is going to give you just what you put in it. Put your whole heart in everything you do, and pray, then you can wait” (269). This while being an encouragement to Maya, I felt had an effect that was not too significant. The battle was still Maya’s and still won by Maya. Everything contributes to the story in some way, I only put the most important.

The voices of the characters regardless of what part you present will be very relevant to how you message is delivered. Maya’s voice was meant to be arrogant, in sync to how it is described in the book, “while I spoke in supercilious accents, and looked at the room as if I had an oil well in my own backyard, my armpits where being pricked by millions of hot pointed needles. She saw her escape and dived into it” (266). While she does not feel confident or powerful, she was forced to project an aura of confidence and power because she was confronting a white woman. In contrast the white woman, being stuck in an office described as “musty” and now faced by a haughty black lady asking or a job, would have a condescending, monotone voice. The office she works in is old and unclean. She really has nothing to do all day other than talking to the occasional visitor. Thus, I tried to make her sound bored. My decision on the voices of the characters are a reflection on my interpretation of their personality.

In the presentation I started with dialogue. This was, as far as I could hear, a rare choice. The fact that I started with a voice and accent meant there would be difficulty adjusting. This meant that I had to know my Maya voice well. This, however, was not the reason for choosing to start with dialogue. I thought the dialogue was the when all the action started, this also had the added benefit of doubling as an introduction to what was going on. Maya explains, in one sentence, the entire plot of the dramatic interpretation, “I am applying for the job listed in this morning’s *Chronicle* and I’d like to be presented to your personnel manager” (266). The use of this dialogue allowed for me to leap directly into the meat of the story without leaving my audience behind on the happenings of the story. I felt that I made the right choice with that hook.

There are two parts to the dramatic interpretation project. The speech, which we had had ample discussion about, and the delivery of said speech. My performance could best be described as boring. It didn’t stand out. I did not have the flourishes and acting of some of the other presentations. I do however believe that the speech was creative, my Achille’s heel was delivery. The main issue described is the failure to look up from the paper and hand gestures, which in turn effected creativity and originality, along with stage presence. I knew the content, I knew my accents and I had a good speech. I did not present them right.

The delivery is often what makes or breaks a passage. Hearing a book read out loud can give different insights into that book. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings is no exception. One highly distinct change I noticed is that now that I had to make voices for characters and present in said voices, I understood the characters better. This has forced me think deeper about their motives and learn why they do what they do. This has changed my view to the point that whenever I read chapter 34 I do so in the voice that I used to present. The way the characters speak has been changed. Through this they seem more real.

This whirlwind of reasons and different factors influenced me in my decision to use Chapter 34 as my dramatic interpretation essay. These reasons, that it is unique in the book, that it represents her first time standing up for what she. All pointing towards one conclusion, that Maya probably would not have written this book, if her first head on encounter with inequality showed that she could in fact win. To quote her poem, *Still I Rise* “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” (Maya Angelou)

Works Cited

Angelou, Maya. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings.* 1969. Ballentine Books, 2015.