

# The Poem 'Life Doesn't Frighten Me' By Maya Angelou

*Life Doesn't Frighten Me* is a simple, repetitive poem that is written from a child's perspective, the speaker going over things in her life that she has to overcome to move on.

It is a series of loosely connected images tied up with mostly full end rhymes and a repeated refrain which reinforces the idea that, despite what we encounter in life, we do not have to be afraid.

Maya Angelou published this poem in 1993 and it became the title of the book it appeared in, a collaborative effort with artist Jean-Michel Basquiat. His dark and powerful pictures are loved by many, but a minority think them too strong for Angelou's uplifting words.

The poem remains popular and is a standard work taught in many schools and colleges. The short, lyrical stanzas lend themselves to drama and performance and often they are used for a stage monologue or similar work, where the emotions can surface.

This is in line with Maya Angelou's general view of life:

***'I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.'***

*Life Doesn't Frighten Me* suggests that there is a way to overcome fear. Bravado is one thing, but if we are brave and work on a strategy we can get through to the other side and come up smiling. for real. We might need a magical charm to help us but we'll get there because there is nothing to fear, at all.

With an altered rhythm and easy rhyme this poem is arguably best read out loud and best performed by younger people. Watch out for a break in the beat and an altered rhyme late on in the poem.

All is explained below.

## Life Doesn't Frighten Me

Shadows on the wall  
Noises down the hall  
Life doesn't frighten me at all

Bad dogs barking loud  
Big ghosts in a cloud  
Life doesn't frighten me at all

Mean old Mother Goose  
Lions on the loose  
They don't frighten me at all

Dragons breathing flame  
On my counterpane  
That doesn't frighten me at all.

I go boo  
Make them shoo  
I make fun  
Way they run  
I won't cry  
So they fly  
I just smile  
They go wild

Life doesn't frighten me at all.

Tough guys fight  
All alone at night  
Life doesn't frighten me at all.

Panthers in the park  
Strangers in the dark  
No, they don't frighten me at all.

That new classroom where  
Boys all pull my hair  
(Kissy little girls  
With their hair in curls)  
They don't frighten me at all.

Don't show me frogs and snakes  
And listen for my scream,  
If I'm afraid at all  
It's only in my dreams.

I've got a magic charm  
That I keep up my sleeve  
I can walk the ocean floor  
And never have to breathe.

Life doesn't frighten me at all  
Not at all  
Not at all.

Life doesn't frighten me at all.

## Analysis of Life Doesn't Frighten Me

*Life Doesn't Frighten Me* is a rhyming poem with a total of 13 stanzas (unlucky for some?) creating 44 lines made up of couplets with refrain, quatrains with slant rhyme, and an ending of repetitive chant.

Picture a small child, a girl, lying in her bed at night listening and looking in the moments before sleep.

There are shadows on the wall creating strange figures perhaps, moonlight through tree branches? And beyond her room door she can hear noises which she can't quite make out. Do these things frighten her? No way. They might have done at one time but not now.

Down the street she can hear those rough dogs barking again. What are they so noisy about? And in the big cloud close to the moon she can see a phantom, a ghost. Not one but several, all folded up and looking weird. But is she fearful? Nah.

What about Mother Goose, she of nursery rhyme fame. Quite a mean creature deep down. And those lions on the run, ferocious beats they are, they could play havoc in your imagination. They're spread across the bed you are about to go to sleep in. Scared? Not one bit.

There are other images on your bedspread. Firey dragons breathing flame. What if you catch fire, that would be frightening? I won't catch fire so I'm not frightened.

In fact, the speaker in the poem turns the tables and becomes proactive. She shouts boo, she makes them scared, scared enough to vamoosh, every last one of them.

In the real world outside her window there are guys fighting. She knows they are tough, alone in their own violence. This doesn't frighten her.

Even panthers in the park don't frighten her. And strange folk lurking in the dark? No. Why should she be frightened?

Up close and personal - she's thinking about school - those boys who pull her hair which is a bit different to the other girls' hair. She's not afraid of them.

The speaker, the child, the girl, convinces herself that nothing life can throw at her, nothing her imagination conjures up, can truly frighten her. Her brave and strong stance will prevail; courage is best.

One question does remain and possibly will need working out. Is it necessary to confront those hidden fears and phobias we know nothing about? Do things that scare us have to be outed, taboo subjects brought into the light and questioned?

The poem suggests that we can all take on life's challenges and come through smiling, with positive approaches working best.