

## = Letter to My Daughter =

Letter to My Daughter ( 2009 ) is the third book of essays by African @-@ American writer and poet Maya Angelou . By the time it was published , Angelou had written two other books of essays , several volumes of poetry , and six autobiographies . She was recognized and highly respected as a spokesperson for Blacks and women , and had become " a major autobiographical voice of the time " . Angelou had no daughters herself , but was inspired to write Letter as she was going through 20 years of notes and essay ideas , some of which were written for her friend Oprah Winfrey . Angelou wrote the book for the thousands of women who saw her as a mother figure , and to share the wisdom gained throughout her long life .

Letter consists of 28 short essays , which includes a few poems and a commencement address , and is dedicated to " the daughter she never had " . Reviews of the book were generally positive ; most reviewers recognized that the book was full of Angelou 's wisdom and that it read like words of advice from a beloved grandmother or aunt . One reviewer found the book 's essays both homespun and " hokey " .

## = = Background = =

Letter to My Daughter is Maya Angelou 's third book of essays . She had published several volumes of poetry , including Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water ' fore I Diie ( 1971 ) , which was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize . She had recited her poem , " On the Pulse of Morning " , at the inauguration of President Bill Clinton in 1993 , making her the first poet to make an inaugural recitation since Robert Frost at John F. Kennedy 's inauguration in 1961 . In 2009 , when Letter was published , Angelou had published six out of her seven installments of her series of autobiographies . Her sixth autobiography , A Song Flung Up to Heaven ( 2002 ) , was considered her final autobiography until she published her seventh autobiography , Mom & Me & Mom , in 2013 , at the age of 85 .

By the time Letter was published , Angelou had become recognized and highly respected as a spokesperson for Blacks and women . She was , as scholar Joanne Braxton has stated , " without a doubt ... America 's most visible black woman autobiographer " . She had also become , as reviewer Richard Long stated , " a major autobiographical voice of the time " . Angelou was one of the first African @-@ American female writers to publicly discuss her personal life , and one of the first to use herself as a central character in her books . Writer Julian Mayfield , who called her first autobiography , I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings , " a work of art that eludes description " , stated that Angelou 's series set a precedent not only for other Black women writers , but for the genre of autobiography as a whole .

## = = Overview = =

Angelou came up with Letter to My Daughter , which became a New York Times bestseller , while going through old boxes of notes and papers full of concepts for future books and poems , which she called " WIP " ( " Works in Progress " ) . She found twenty years worth of notes written to her friend Oprah Winfrey , and realized that she should put the essays they inspired into a book so that others could read them . Although she had no daughters , and gave birth to a son ( Guy Johnson ) , which she called " the best thing that ever happened to me in my life " , many women in Angelou 's career looked to her as a mother figure . She wrote Letters to speak to those women and to share with them the wisdom she has gained throughout her long life . According to writer Gary Younge of The Guardian , most of the essays " end with the kind of wisdom that , depending on your taste , qualifies as either homespun or hokey " . For example , she uses what has been called her most famous statement , when speaking of Cuban artist Celia Cruz : " We are more alike than unlike " . Although Angelou discounts the idea when he brings it up to her , Younge thinks Letter reads like an extended farewell ; in her 500 @-@ word introduction she mentions death twice .

Letter consists of 28 " short epistles " , which includes a few poems and a commencement address , and is dedicated to " the daughter she never had " . Angelou thanks several women on her

dedication page , which is divided into three groups . The first group of five women , which includes her grandmother Annie Henderson and her mother Vivian Baxter , she calls " ... some women who mothered me through dark and bright days " . The second group has only one name , Dr. Dorothy Height , " ... one woman who allows me to be a daughter to her , even today " . The final group is the largest , made up of 12 women , whom she calls " women not born to me but who allow me to mother them " . The group includes Winfrey , Gayle King , her niece Rosa Johnson Butler , her assistant Lydia Stuckey , and gospel singer Valerie Simpson .

= = Reviews = =

In his review of Letter to My Daughter , Younge states , " At moments in the book she sounds like an elderly relative , distraught at the wayward manners of the young , " but also says that Angelou seems to have " outlived the need for social convention " . Kirkus Reviews finds " old fashioned wisdom " in the book , and calls it " a slim volume packed with nourishing nuggets of wisdom " . Reviewer Karen Algeo Krizman says that " Angelou delivers with her signature passion and fire " and that although the essays are " easy to take in during brief moments of quiet " , they have a powerful message . Laura L. Hutchison of The Fredricksburg Free Lance @-@ Star states that Letter is " written in Angelou 's beautiful , poetic style " and called the essays " advice from a beloved aunt or grandmother , whose wisdom you know was earned " . Hutchinson also stated that the book would gain Angelou new readers , and that her current audience would read and reread it . Psychologists Eranda Jayawickreme and Marie J. C. Forgearda called the essays in Letter to My Daughter " illuminating " and used it as a non @-@ scientific , interdisciplinary text to teach positive psychology .

Victoria Brownworth of The Baltimore Sun , who compares Angelou to populist poets such as Walt Whitman , notes that while reading Letter , " one cannot help but be struck by how much Angelou has overcome and how far she has come " . Brownworth states that despite Angelou 's harrowing and complex experiences , and the barriers she had to overcome , Angelou was " filled with life and generosity and a deep yearning to pass her story on to other young women " . Brownworth calls Angelou 's prose " colloquial and from the heart " . She also compares Angelou 's " fluid narrative " to oral history , and states , " The kernels of insight and , yes , wisdom in this small volume will stay with the reader for a long time " .

= = = Explanatory notes = = =