

Caged Bird

Poem

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| Get Going! | ✧ Explain the question and let the students discuss it with their partners. Let them express their views freely. Provide useful inputs of your own to guide the discussion. |
| Read and Enjoy | <ul style="list-style-type: none">✧ 'Caged Bird' is written by Maya Angelou, an American poet largely known for her autobiographical works. It was first published in the collection 'Shaker, Why Don't You Sing?' in 1983. It is a long poem dealing with the inherent need for freedom in human beings.✧ Angelou's life is a testament to the lives of Black Americans and the way they have struggled throughout history against every form of exploitation and looked for freedom. This poem depicts their plight through the metaphor of a bird.✧ The poem is divided into six stanzas and is largely written in free verse.✧ Stanza 1: The poet begins with a description of a free bird. She describes how a bird that is free to fly performs all kinds of tricks in the air. The bird reminds us of the people who are free to live as they wish. They can do whatever they want to. The free bird 'dips his wing in the orange sun rays'. Only a free person 'dares to claim the sky'. Freedom knows no limit.✧ Stanza 2: The poet then talks of a bird that is inside his 'narrow cage'. Such a bird cannot see through his 'bars of rage'. Restriction from freedom fills us with anger for the injustice we feel towards life. In such anger, one cannot see ahead.✧ In the poem, the bird inside the cage has no wings to fly because they are clipped and his feet are tied. He cannot go anywhere, so he does the only thing that he can do: use his mouth to sing. This reminds us of the poet's own life in which she faced so much hardship but kept singing through her poems.✧ Stanza 3: The caged bird has a wavering voice. He is singing of freedom, something he does not have. The idea of freedom is his dream, something he cannot achieve. So, he sings about it. There is fear in his voice. He had never known what freedom tastes like, but hopes to have it one day. His voice can be heard from distant places, on hills where it inspires others to dream of freedom. The caged bird doesn't sing of sadness, but of hope, inspiration and freedom. |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✧ Stanza 4: The free bird, on the other hand, revels in his freedom. He enjoys flying through ‘the trade winds’ that blow through the trees. Here, ‘sighing trees’ refers to the sighing sound made by the breeze while passing through the leafy branches. ✧ The free bird thinks of the fat worm that will be his food. With the wind in his feathers, water and earth beneath him and the whole sky with him, he feels majestic in his freedom and calls the entire sky his own domain. By ‘names the sky his own’, the poet highlights the fact that the bird knows himself to be the owner of this whole universe. Here, the sky stands for the universe. ✧ Stanza 5: The caged bird, by contrast, knows that he is not flying in the sky, that he is not free, but a captive, a prisoner. He thus ‘stands on the grave of dreams’. He knows his dreams of flying, of hoping to experience freedom is futile. He has lost all hope of freedom. His shadow ‘shouts on a nightmare scream’. It is more pitiable, more adverse than a nightmare. His wings are clipped and feet are tied. There is only a little hope of freedom, and so the bird opens his throat to sing. There is a faint but kindling voice of hope in his song. ✧ Stanza 6: This refrain recurring as a stanza justifies the bird’s strong determination to keep going after his dream of freedom. Moreover, the caged bird chooses to sing as this is the only freedom available to him, something that he can enjoy without any restriction. His wings are clipped, feet are tied, but his throat is not choked yet. He sings despite his pitiable state. ✧ This can be seen as the poet’s message: to raise our voice, to express ourselves even though the stronger wants to suppress the weaker. We must never give up, no matter how hopeless our situation may seem to be. | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✧ Exercises A, B and C: Explain the exercises. Do them orally first and then ask the students to write the answers in their books/notebooks. It is advisable to check and assess their work individually. | Read and Understand |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✧ Exercise A: Read the question. Do it orally first and then ask the students to write the answers in their notebooks. It is advisable to check and assess their work individually. | Think and Answer |

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| <p>Appreciating the Poem</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✧ Explain the terms 'alliteration' and 'personification' and their use in writing, especially in poetry, with suitable examples. Alliteration is the use of the same letter or sound at the beginning of words that are close together. For example: 'The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew'/'The furrow followed free' ('Rime of the Ancient Mariner', Samuel Taylor Coleridge). Personification, on the other hand, is a poetic device in which non-living things are given human traits. The opening stanza of William Wordsworth's poem 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud' is an example of personification: When all at once I saw a crowd,/A host, of golden daffodils;/Beside the lake, beneath the trees,/Fluttering and dancing in the breeze. ✧ Exercise A: Do this exercise orally, using the blackboard. Then ask the students to write the answer down. Announce it aloud and let them check their own work. |
| <p>Write Well</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✧ Explain the question so that the students are clear on what is required. Then let them write the paragraph on their own. It is advisable to check and assess their work individually. |
| <p>AIL Activity (Experiential Learning)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✧ Explain the three personalities and their role in the fight against racial discrimination. The students can do this activity under the guidance of the teacher. |