



INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR

Class: VIII	Department: ENGLISH	Date of submission: December 2021
Worksheet No: 23	Topic: CAGED BIRD (POEM)	Note: For reference

The setting of the Poem:

The caged bird is a symbol of the plight of Black American people. Its song is a reference to how slaves in the 19th century came together at Congo Square to sing as a way of remembering their heritage. The bars of rage on the caged bird's cage are supposed to represent the bird's blinding anger at being locked up.

Stanza wise meaning of the Poem:

*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.*

The first four lines of "Caged Bird" focus on the life of a "free bird"—that is, one that doesn't live in a cage. The free bird can "leap / on the back of the wind" and simply float "downstream" without a destination in mind, continuing "till the current ends." These actions demonstrate its easy-going, carefree lifestyle. This free bird is not only able to go wherever it pleases, but its sense of freedom also makes it feel powerful: it "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 second stanza changes the atmosphere completely. Its main focus is on the caged bird and its pain as being confined. The cage's narrow form shows how limiting its confines are as opposed to the openness of the free bird's sky. The bars of rage refer to how due to its anger and pain, the caged bird can barely see past its sorrow. The clipped wings and bound feet are supposed to show how its freedom was taken away from it. The line where the bird opens his mouth to sing is a turning point in the stanza as it is the only thing that the bird can do willingly. The change to the dark mood of the cage bird's narrative is made all the more jarring by the considerably lighter mood of the first stanza.

*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 third stanza goes deeper into the caged bird's song. The bird sings with fear and apprehension for it doesn't wish to live the rest of its life in such a confined manner. The next two lines of things unknown and longed for still is a paradox, for someone cannot long for something they do not know. Here, Angelou is referring to the way someone who was captive all his life would yearn for freedom.

It states that it is an innate emotion to have control over one's self even if the person in question has never had the chance to feel that way. The caged bird's song reaching far enough to the distant hill is a metaphor for how calls of justice are always heard, but not always reciprocated.

*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*

In the fourth stanza, the free bird thinks of things that the caged bird has never experienced and has had the privilege to enjoy them. The fat worms mentioned could be a kind of privilege along with the dawn bright lawn because they seem there just to serve the free bird's desires. By naming the sky his own, the free bird states that there is no other being that is obliged to share it with. This aligns with the preconceived notion that some groups of people are born with rights over others.

*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.*

In the fifth stanza, the tone shifts yet again from the free bird's bright imagery to the chilling narrative of the caged bird. The grave of dreams refers to all the hopes the caged bird might have had at an earlier age than now seems irrelevant or impossible at its current stage.

The caged bird's shadow is a personification of his powerlessness. The nightmare problem refers to a small part of the caged bird that fears it will never be released. The caged bird continues to sing despite its wavering resilience, showing that it believes that life will get better and will continue to persist.

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Maya Angelou

The final stanza is a repeat of the third, which delves into the bird's song. The bird cries out about freedom, but it's never stated if its cries are ever heard by its free-flying twin.

A CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF THE POEM

A) Poetic Devices used in the Poem:

The poet has used several poetic devices in the poem.

- **Metaphor:**

The poet uses metaphor (an indirect comparison) when she compares wind to water. The words 'downstream' and 'current' make us think of the tides in a sea or ocean.

*"... and floats downstream
till the current ends"*

Again, she uses metaphors in the use of two birds — "free bird" and "caged bird".

- **Alliteration:**

Alliteration (repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of nearby words) is used in places like —

*"...can seldom see through (repetition of 's' sound)
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn
his shadow shouts on a nightmare screams"*

- **Personification:**

The poet personifies (applies human characteristics) the two birds when she says —

*'dips his wing', 'dares to claim the sky', 'name the sky his own', 'opens his throat to sing', 'sings of freedom'
etc.*

B) The Theme of the Poem:

- The poem describes the opposing experiences between two birds: one bird can live in nature as it pleases, while a different caged bird suffers in captivity. Due to its profound suffering, the caged bird sings, both to cope with its circumstances and to express its own longing for freedom.
- Oppression and the African-American Experience: In the poem, extended metaphor can be seen as portraying the experience of being a member of the African American community. As an extended metaphor used to convey the pain of the oppression experienced by the African American community throughout (and before) the history of the United States, aspects of the poem can be read as directly

related to that African - American experience.

- Freedom vs. Captivity: The poem “Caged Bird” compares and contrasts the experience of a free bird with that of a bird held in captivity. While part of this contrast is meant to convey the injustice forced upon the captive bird, the comparison also allows the poem to explore how a free being thinks and acts, and to argue that freedom is a natural state for living beings

C) Rhyme Scheme of the Poem

'Caged Bird' by Maya Angelou is a six-stanza poem that is separated into stanzas that range in length. Angelou chose to write the poem in free verse. This means that **there is no single rhyme scheme or metrical pattern** that unites all the lines.

Summary of the Poem:

- A free bird flies in the wind, as if floating downstream until the wind current shifts, and the bird dips its wings in the orange sunlight, and he dares to call the sky his own.
- But a bird that moves angrily and silently in a small cage can barely see through either the cage bars or his own anger His wings are cut so he cannot fly, and his feet are tied together, so he opens his throat to sing.
- The caged bird sings fearfully of things he does not know, but still wants, and his song can be heard from as far away as distant hills, because the caged bird sings about freedom.
- The free bird thinks about another breeze, and about the global winds that blow from east to west and make the trees sound as if they are sighing, and he thinks of the fat worms waiting to be eaten on the lawn in the early morning light, and he says he owns the sky.
- But a caged bird stands on the grave of his own dead dreams, and his dream-self screams from the nightmares he has. His wings are trimmed down, and his feet are tied, so he opens his throat to sing.
- The caged bird sings fearfully of things he does not know, but still wants, and his song can be heard from as far away as distant hills, because the caged bird sings about freedom.