

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings Independent Reading Packet

### Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906)

#### Sympathy

I know what the caged bird feels, alas!  
 When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;  
 When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,  
 And the river flows like a stream of glass;  
 When the first bird sings and the first bud opes,  
 And the faint perfume from its chalice steals —  
 I know what the caged bird feels!

I know why the caged bird beats his wing  
 Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;  
 For he must fly back to his perch and cling  
 When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;  
 And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars  
 And they pulse again with a keener sting —  
 I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,  
 When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,—  
 When he beats his bars and he would be free;  
 It is not a carol of joy or glee,  
 But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,  
 But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings —  
 I know why the caged bird sings!

**Activity 1: Poetry. In at least a paragraph, what do you think the meaning of this poem is?**

**Activity 2: Character Chart**

**Directions:** For each character, list at least FOUR characteristics that accurately describe them.

<b>Characters</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
<b>Maya Angelou (Marguerite Ann Johnson)</b>	
<b>Bailey Johnson, Jr.</b>	
<b>Annie Henderson (Momma)</b>	
<b>Vivian Baxter</b>	
<b>Big Bailey Johnson</b>	
<b>Daddy Clidell</b>	
<b>Mr. Freeman</b>	
<b>Mrs. Bertha Flowers</b>	
<b>Dr. Lincoln</b>	
<b>Miss Kirwin</b>	

**Activity 3: Vocabulary Development.** As you read through the chapters, define the following vocabulary words to help you better understand the novel.

Chapter	Vocabulary Words	Definitions
1.	Calamitous	
2.	Ominous	
3.	Insolent	
4.	Admonish	
5.	Vex	
6.	Abate	
7.	Morose	
8.	Ludicrous	
9.	Exemplary	
10.	Affluent	
11.	Ambrosia	
12.	Treacherous	
13.	Profuse	
14.	Placate	
15.	Summon	
16.	Excruciating	
17.	Unravel	
18.	Pretentious	
19.	Duplicate	
20.	Triumphant	
21.	Anticipate	
22.	Abruptly	

**Chapter Questions** – Please write on a separate paper and attach.

### **Prologue**

1. Where is Maya?
2. What does she want to wake up from?
3. What does she want to look like?
4. List three things Maya is doing as she runs out of the church.

### **Chapters 1-5**

1. What happens to Maya's parents?
2. Where do they go to live?
3. How is Momma viewed throughout the community?
4. What stereotype enrages Maya?
5. What holds Willie back?
6. Who does Maya fall in love with? Why does she feel guilty about it?
7. Why did Momma hide Willie?
8. What has Maya heard all throughout childhood? Describe her characteristics.
9. Who defends her, which in turn makes him the most important person in her world?

**Chapters 6-15**

1. Who comes to visit every 3 months?
2. What does Momma say it's not safe to do?
3. Why do Maya and Bailey cry after receiving the Christmas gifts?
4. Why do you think they destroyed the doll?
5. Where do the children go with Big Bailey?
6. Why is Maya indifferent to Big Bailey leaving?
7. Explain St. Louis through the eyes of Maya.
8. What advice does Uncle Tommy give Maya?
9. How does Maya shield herself against the confusion of St. Louis?
10. What happens between Maya and Mr. Freeman? Does she fully understand it?
11. Why does she feel rejected when Mr. Freeman ignores her?
12. What does Mr. Freeman do to Maya in chapter 12? What is his threat?
13. Why does Maya consider herself a grown woman in chapter 13?
14. What is the reaction to her silence?
15. Why is Momma offended at the end of chapter 15?

**Chapters 16- 22**

1. Describe what happens while Maya works for Mrs. Viola Cullinan's. (Chapters 16)
2. What is the irony of Bailey liking the actress, Kay Francis?
3. Explain how the black people try to escape their harsh lives in chapter 18.
4. What does the winning of Louis' fight mean for the black people?
5. Why do you think Maya reacted negatively to Tommy Valdon's request for Valentine's day?
6. Explain Bailey's version of playing "house."
7. Explain Maya's first experience with mortality.

**Chapters 23- 31**

1. How does Edward Donleavy's speech blemish the joy of the graduation day? Explain using examples and details.
2. How does Mama handle Maya's toothache? What does this show about white men during this time period?
3. Describe what shakes Bailey in chapter 25. What does Momma decide to do about it?
4. Describe the family dynamics in chapter 26.
5. During WWII, the Japanese displacement took place, what did this do for black people?
6. Explain Maya's educational advancements in chapters 27 and 28.
7. How does Maya view Daddy Clidell?
8. Describe Maya and Big Bailey's "shopping trip."
9. What is the result of Maya's honorable gesture towards Dolores? Explain in detail.

**Chapters 32- 36**

1. Describe and explain Maya's experience in the car junkyard.
2. What does Maya learn to appreciate?
3. Explain, in detail, Bailey's struggles. (Chapter 33)
4. What does Maya succeed in becoming the first at?
5. What confusion does Maya have after reading *The Well of Loneliness*?
6. What does she discover at the end of chapter 35?
7. Maya accepts responsibility for her pregnancy, however what does she fear? What advice does Vivian give her?
8. Why do you think this piece of advice put Maya at ease?
9. How do you interpret the ending of the novel? What lingering questions do you still have for Maya or in general?