

Chapter Questions for I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. Please write the question and then the answers.

### Introductory Pages

1. Describe Marguerite's dress in these pages.
2. What did Marguerite hope the dress would do for her?
3. How did the truth of the day contrast with Marguerite's hopes?

### Chapter 1

1. Who is telling the story?
2. Identify Stamps, Arkansas. What was it like?
3. What was the operation of the Wm. Johnson General Merchandise Store?
4. How did the storyteller feel about the cotton picker's lot in life?

### Chapter 2

1. Describe Uncle Willy.
2. Discuss the phrase "Uncle Willie was a study in contrasts."
3. What did Shakespeare's phrase mean, "When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes"? How does this phrase help us understand Marguerite?
4. Why did Momma disfavor white writers?

### Chapter 3

1. Why was pineapple almost sacred to the storyteller?
2. Why did Uncle Willie hide?
3. What did Marguerite think of Mr. Steward?

### Chapter 4

1. What is an anachronism? Who was the anachronism in Stamps?
2. What has the author revealed of Bailey? In other words, describe Bailey.
3. How did Marguerite and Bailey approach the white part of town?
4. What did the author know of whites as a child?

## Chapter 5

1. What were Momma's two most important rules?
2. What are "powhitetrash"?
3. How did Momma deal with powhitetrash?
4. Why does the narrator call Annie Henderson "Momma"?
5. What was the interchange between Momma and Helen, Ruth, and Eloise?
6. What did Helen, Ruth, and Eloise reveal in their actions toward Momma?
7. What was the impact of the powhitetrash incident on Marguerite?
8. Why does Momma call Marguerite sister?

## Chapter 6

1. Why is Reverend Howard Thomas despised by the children?
2. Reenact "the incident" in a multi-panelled cartoon layout (storyboard).
3. What is an "unvoiced command"?
4. Explain from page 34 "obedient children should not see or hear if they chose not to do so."
5. "There's a thin line between humor and hysteria." Explain with examples from the book.

## Chapter 7

1. Describe Momma.
2. What does the Mrs. Henderson incident in Chapter 7 tell you about Stamps, Arkansas?

## Chapter 8

1. What does so prejudiced that "a Negro couldn't buy vanilla ice cream" mean?
2. How did the Depression affect Stamps and the family?
3. Why would Christmas presents provoke tears from Bailey and Marguerite?

## Chapter 9

1. Who was the stranger who arrived unexpectedly in Stamps?

2. Why didn't Marguerite "bond" with her father?
3. Describe the Pig Latin fiasco.
4. Why does Marguerite feel more alienated when she sees her mother again?

#### Chapter 10

1. Describe Grandma Baxter.
2. What did Bailey and Maya learn in St. Louis?
3. How did Maya feel in St. Louis?

#### Chapter 11

1. Why did reading especially appeal to Maya?
2. How did Maya find herself in an abusive situation?

#### Chapter 12

1. Why was Maya raped?
2. How did her mother react when Maya went to bed without being told?

#### Chapter 13

1. How did the family handle the identification of Mr. Freeman's assault on Maya?
2. Why did Maya lie on the witness stand? How is her thinking typical of eight-year-olds?
3. How did Maya feel at the end of Chapter 13?
4. How might the adult Maya have advised the adult players in Chapter 13?

#### Chapter 14

1. How is "resignation" a theme for this chapter?
2. Reread the paragraph on page 77 commencing "Sounds came to me dully. . ." What does it mean? How has the author gone about recreating the mood and feeling of that time in her life?

## Chapter 15

1. How does Maya describe her feelings at the start of the chapter?
2. Who is Bertha Flowers? How does Maya describe her?
3. What advice does Bertha Flowers give to Maya?
4. Explain the phrase “unasked and unanswerable questions” from page 81.
5. What difference does being liked for being herself make to Maya?
6. What was the abomination before Christ in the chapter?

## Chapter 16

1. What did Maya learn at her “finishing school”?
2. How did Maya extricate herself from working in Mrs. Viola Cullinan’s kitchen?
3. Was Maya justified in breaking the china? Explain.
4. Why is Marguerite’s correct name important to her? Why does she not object to Maya, but dislikes being called Mary?

## Chapter 17

1. Why was Bailey whipped in Chapter 17?
2. Why didn’t Bailey explain?
3. What do you predict for Bailey in the rest of the book? Justify your answer by using evidence from the book.
4. How did the Kay Francis movie affect Bailey?

## Chapter 18

1. What is the idea developed in the second paragraph on page 101?
2. How were dead-tired cotton pickers able to go to the revival?
3. On page 107 in the first paragraph, “The congregation knew whom he was talking about. . .” Who was it?
4. What is Maya’s attitude about the revival, the evangelist’s message and the Black churches? Explain using evidence from the book.
5. What was the interesting musical note at the end of Chapter 18?

## Chapter 19

1. What is the significance of the Louis-Carnera fight for the Stamps Black community?
2. Look for a paragraph of metaphors for the fight. Cite and explain the effectiveness of the metaphors.
3. What does the last paragraph in the chapter mean?

## Chapter 20

1. Describe the scene, the mood, and the feelings of the Stamps summer picnic fish fry.
2. What people went to the picnic fish fry? Why was the event segregated by race?
3. Who was Louise Kendricks? What did they share?
4. Why did Tommy Valdon stop paying attention to Maya?

## Chapter 21

1. Who was Joyce?
2. How did Joyce affect the characters in the book?

## Chapter 22

1. How does Mr. George Taylor look? Why does the author describe him in such detail?
2. What really happened to George Taylor?
3. Why does Maya remember so many details of Florida Taylor's funeral? Choose three adjectives to describe the funeral.
4. What books were Bailey and Maya reading during this chapter? What is special about a good book on a stormy night?

## Chapter 23

1. What is the mood of the chapter?
2. How does the beginning of the chapter compare with the middle and end?

3. Reread aloud and explain the first paragraph on page 153. Why does Maya express so much rage?

#### Chapter 24

1. How did you feel after reading this chapter?
2. Why does Momma think Dr. Lincoln will treat Maya?
3. How does Dr. Lincoln answer Momma's request?
4. Why are pages 161 and 162 set in italics?
5. What really happens between Momma and Dr. Lincoln?

#### Chapter 25

1. How does Maya explain Momma's nature?
2. Discuss and then explain these quotes from this chapter:  
"If you ask a Negro where he's been, he'll tell you where's he's going."  
(p.164). "The humorless puzzle of inequality and hate." (p. 168).
3. Why has Momma decided to take to children to California?
4. What special "gifts" will Maya take with her from Arkansas?
5. How do Maya and Momma prepare for the trip?

#### Chapter 26

1. How do you suppose Maya felt during the year she moved from Stamps to Los Angeles to Oakland to San Francisco?
2. How old was Maya at the end of Chapter 26?
3. Compare Vivian Baxter to Momma.

#### Chapter 27

1. How did San Francisco change in the early months of World War II? Why?
2. Read aloud the first paragraph on page 181. Comment on the text. What is racism?

#### Chapter 28

1. Describe each of Maya's high school experiences.
2. Look at Maya's stated allegiances in Chapter 28.

3. How would Maya define a great teacher? What advice would she give to a new teacher?

#### Chapter 29

1. Explain Angelou's praise of "strength lined with tenderness" and the combination of intelligence and necessity when unblunted by formal education.
2. Define Black ethics as discussed in the last three paragraphs of Chapter 29.
3. Why do people move from formal language to informal colloquial speech?

#### Chapter 30

1. Why don't Maya and Dolores Stockland become instant friends?
2. Why does Maya expect of the Mexican visit? What does she get on that visit?
3. How would Maya describe the Mexican visit to her brother?
4. How does Bailey Sr. get them out of the accident dilemma?

#### Chapter 31

1. How does the Dolores-Maya relationship resolve itself?
2. Maya has a lot of questions about what to do. Why does she leave the trailer?
3. What do you predict for Maya on her own?

#### Chapter 32

1. Where does Maya find refuge after she leaves Bailey Sr.'s friends?
2. What kind of a society do the junkyard kids create? What are the rules? How is Maya treated?
3. What does Maya say she learned from her month in the yard?

#### Chapter 33

1. What is Maya's wisdom on growing up?
2. Why does Bailey move out of his mother's house?
3. What does Maya find surprising when she visits Bailey's new room?

## Chapter 34

1. How does her mother react to Maya's streetcar aspirations?
2. How is Maya treated when she goes to the Market Street Railway Company?
3. On page 227, Maya mentions the "puppeteer." Explain that reference.
4. How had Maya changed when she returned to school?
5. How does Maya summarize the plight of young Black females?

## Chapter 35

1. How is this chapter about these themes: stereotypes, innocence, unfortunate choices?

## Chapter 36

1. How did Maya deal with her pregnancy?
2. What is your sense of Maya as a mother?