The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou Study Guide

The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou by Maya Angelou

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

The poems of this collection range from humorous to tragic, long to short, introspective to global. The poet grows much throughout the work, dealing with bigger and more complex issues. Any poem allows for analysis, though no analysis will be complete, as the poem speaks to each reader differently. Race, class, and gender are just a few of the themes discussed in this work.

Part One: "Where Love is a Scream of Anguish"

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"They Went Home" tells of a person who receives praise of many men. She possesses the virtues of cleanliness, grace, witty speech, and beauty. The nature of the relationship between the narrator and the men remains unknown, but they do tell their wives of the narrator's home. The men stay only a few days and return home. As the name would suggest, "The Gamut" takes the reader through the elation and regret of a visiting lover. First, the narrator admonishes the sun as the lover approaches. In the second stanza, he/she hangs onto the words of the lover. In the final stanza, the lover departs, leaving a heart that nearly dies from the separation.

The language becomes more personal and explicit in the third poem, "A Zorro Man." The narrator describes a scene of loving making, complete with seductive lighting. He/she seems to be remembering a time with the man, every drape and mirror bringing images of their love making to mind. The narrator extols the beauties and virtues of a much-admired man in "To a Man." Words such as "Golden, Amber, Brandy, French tobacco, and Southern" are used. The man is secretive, like a great cat. He also possesses gentleness and fire. The narrator sees the man as always changing, like fire or amber.

"Late October" is a short poem that goes through many stages. The first stanza describes the autumnal process, with dying leaves and shortening days. The second stanza, though, applies the truth of autumn, to lovers who, the writer claims, see the end that autumn signifies. All is not negative, however, as the ends serve only as a place to begin again. In "No Loser, No Weeper," a woman remembers how she hated loosing items such as a dime, a doll, and a watch. She points out, then, that she will also be upset if she loses her man.

The narrator of the poem, "When You Come to Me," receives an invitation to a bygone time that holds fond memories. However, the speaker knows that the unwelcome biddings will not last or end well. "Remembering," tells of a narrator who is caught up in memories that will not fade. His/her soul suffers from the walk down memory lane. No matter what the future looks like, it all ends in sadness, according to "In a Time." Even if it looks like love or joy lays in the horizon, life takes a turn for the worst in the end.

"Tears" defines the very subject of its title. In short order, tears are defined as "crystal rags" and "viscous tatters." Moans, likewise, are called "swan song" and "blue farewell." The poem "The Detached" points out that the largest parts of life are within oneself. However, anyone can become blind to this fact. Many people seek relief from such pressures from the external, but the speaker of the poem points out that internal problems cannot be solved from without.

A woman lives vicariously through the experiences of her husband in "To a Husband." To her, he seems mysterious. Between them roams "phantoms." However, their relationship does not seem loving; she gets much more exposure to the outside world through her husband. In "Accident," the narrator avoids the magic of a former lover. When the usual wooing does not have the desired effect, he/she notices the dirty and undesirable nature of the lover. In the second stanza, the narrator admits that he/she failed to see the rainbows of beautiful words this time. Only the stark truth remains visible.

Wishing for a better time, the narrator of "Let's Majeste" dreams of being royalty. He/she thinks of crowns and royal subjects. Time itself would be a servant to him/her. In the last stanza, however, the narrator wakens to realize that it has been a dream. In "After," the entire world lays peaceful around two lovers. No sound or fight disturbs the peace. Even business in the market slows down, and the streets and cars remain calm. Love from two lovers in bed affects the whole world.

A woman in distress, though not of her own making, finds comfort at home in the dark in "The Mothering Blackness." Though the narrator fails to identify the source, the woman flees from some terror of the world. Though something happened to her, she is not at fault for the act. The details, however, remain vague. "On Diverse Deviations" shows pain hiding behind the curtain of love. The writer wishes for a world where the pain that inevitably comes from love would be shown from the onset of the affair.

As is a common thought, the narrator of "Mourning Grace" wonders who will be sad, should he/she die. Such an event would be a premature waste of time, he/she fears. He/she asks the reader to have the grace to mourn. "How I Can Lie to You" defines the proper way to tell a lie. A special vocal effect is necessary, as is a cold look. In "Sounds Like Pearls," the narrator avows that sweet talk works for whoever speaks to him/her. The words fall on eager ears like pearls. The listener blushes, and all doubts flee.

Part One: "Where Love is a Scream of Anguish" Analysis

The first poem in this chapter illustrates deep loneliness and sadness. However, this person, who the reader may assume is a woman, because the author is a woman, strives to impress male acquaintances, but he/she does not capture a long-term relationship. The last stanza ends with the lingering "But..." symbolizing the restless nature of this lonely person. The narrator of the love poem, "The Gamut," supplicates with all of nature to make the most of a visit from his/her lover. The imagery of silver

throats and golden voice shows the value that the narrator places on the lover. This explains why, when the lover leaves, the narrator feels his/her heart is deathly and quiet. The language of this poem alludes to the Song of Solomon, with the dialogue between the narrator and nature as the lover approaches.

"A Zorro Man" seems, on the surface, to be steamy and happy. Each stanza begins with "Here," which seems to echo the pleas of a lover. Upon examination, however, the reader sees that the narrator's surroundings are simply calling to mind a time that has passed. These memories are only flashes, images, and reflections. In the end, the reader learns, the time has passed, and the love no longer trembles before the narrator. The out-of-place capitalization in "To a Man" adds emphasis to the simple words used to describe this man. There is also seeming contradiction in the man's gentleness, which is like a big cat on a hunt. Though this presents an irony, the narrator sees it all as positive traits.

The imagery of the fall season in "Late October" includes symbols of autumn such as falling leaves and early sunsets. The twist at the end, however, reveals the fact that the many endings of the autumn make for the new beginnings of the New Year. An irony lies at the heart of the poem "No Loser, No Weeper." A love that would be really missed is compared to such trivial things as a coin and a doll. In addition, there is an irony in the last stanza, in that by saying, "I ain't threatening," the speaker actually makes a threat.

In "When You Come to Me," the narrator knows the hopelessness following the memories and follows anyway. The memories are personified as an attic full of stolen kisses and borrowed loves. Metaphors compare memories to ghosts in "Remembering." The ghosts are personified as strange ghouls from whom the narrator cannot escape. The use of such elements emphasizes the sadness of the poem. "In a Time" shows a striking and unusual form, as the last line of each stanza rhymes. Also striking is the use of opposites in the stanzas. Left and right, today and tomorrow and truths and lies are examples of some of the contrary terms compared in this poem.

The writer uses an extended metaphor in "Tears" to define two aspects of sorrow: tears and moans. Each term is renamed with multiple, metaphoric counterparts. Nature is employed to illustrate the properties of these expressions. This poem, "The Detached," points out that, like death and hell, love contains deep emotion, from which many people hide. The imagery of "To a Husband" leans towards the wild and untamed. With visuals such as "fist" and "Congo," the reader feels apprehensive towards the husband. The connection between the husband and wife remains primitive, and that could be interpreted as positive or negative.

Color serves as a contradiction in "Accident." The narrator compares the color of the lover's speech to that of a rainbow. The truth, however, remains "Black-White." The form of the poem shows the difference between the lies of the lover and the truth that the narrator only now sees. "Let's Majeste" not only analyzes the narrator's personal life, but the current times as well. The times of kings receives exaltation, though the narrator admits that kings often treat their subordinates cruelly. As many grand schemes for society in the past, the narrator's grand plan turns out to be only a dream. The imagery

of "After" is that of an empty and spent world. The bare shelves and streets represent the souls of the lovers, which also lie empty, having fully shared with their lovers. The power of love extends, invisibly, outward from the bedroom and into a world usually full of chaos.

Biblical allusion clearly appears in "The Mothering Blackness." The girl, blameless for whatever befalls her, remains blameless as Hagar, the mother of Ishmael. There is also an irony in the very title of the poem. The blackness comforts the woman, though usually dark is the very thing that frightens. Her tears, though, stemming from the terror itself, are white. The writer flips the imagery of black and white, and turns the black into a positive, perhaps subtly implying Angelou's own feelings of "black pride." "On Diverse Deviations" uses an extended metaphor, comparing love to a curtain. Love can hid the pain at the end of an affair, just as a curtain blocks the view into a room. Inside the room of love lie the death and the life of a weary whore, whom love has ruined. Finally, one direct metaphor wishes for love as a scream, signaling the end right from the beginning.

Internal rhyme clearly appears in "Mourning Grace." Repetition of "waste" also lends to the rhyming feel. The form of the poem on the page illustrates the brevity of life. The short poem "How I Can Lie to You" strives for an even voice, as one would do in telling a lie. No capitalization or punctuation is used, to emphasis the evenness of the speech. he writer employs simile in "Sounds Like Pearls," even in the title. The pearl-like sounds work their magic easily, and the listener is won over.

Part Two: "Just Before the World Ends"

Part Two: "Just Before the World Ends" Summary

"When I Think About Myself" tells of someone looking back on a life of sixty years. The person reminisces on the ironies of his/her life. His/her boss is younger than the narrator is, though she must call the boss "Ma'am." The narrator's parents tell stories of questionable truth. The narrator keeps a good spirit, however, and laughs at all the ironies of his/her life. The end of the world, by bombing, is predicted in 'On a Bright Day, Next Week." The narrator predicts he/she will run out of tears, just before the end. Finally, mercy will fall upon those in need, and it will come from the sky, just as the bomb will.

"Letter to an Aspiring Junkie" tells, in street jargon, the daily events in a drug-dealing neighborhood. Though nothing that goes on in this neighborhood counts for anything, various characters fall prey to the drugs. The young and old alike suffer from days of using drugs. In a sacrilegious intertwining of *Gone With the Wind* and Catholicism, "Miss Scarlett, Mr. Rhett, and other Latter-Day Saints" expresses the feelings of a slave toward the hypercriticism of an owner. Young priests sing hymns while whipping the slaves. Ministers make idols of the bones of young, black children, and slave women are violated, seemingly to protect the delicate nature of the slave owner's wife. Interspersed are purposely-misspelled references to other parts of mass, such as the Our Mother and Golgotha. Icons of the old south, such as Rhett Butler, are pictured as equal to the saints.

"Times-Square-Shoeshine-Composition" tells about the financial plans of one shoe shiner. The shiner talks as he works, and the rhythmic "pow pow" adds a beat to the poem. The shiner does proud work, calling it the best. He wins contests in his/her field. The customer pays the fee of thirty-five cents, though the customer tries to haggle it down to only a quarter. This seems to offend the shoe shiner. The shiner says someone who can only afford twenty-five cents should not be getting their shoes shined. After all, the shiner claims, he only follows the capitalist model. A sad childhood pervades "Faces." The narrator comforts a man who looks back on the innocent days of childhood with anger. The speaker reminds him that love can replace hate. An unknown poet issues a warning, but no one hears.

In "To a Freedom Fighter," the narrator witnesses the flogging of the title person. The person fights back tears of anger. That night, the receiver of the beating relives the stripes in nightmares. The narrator hears the anxiety in the person's breathing. Violence abounds in "Riot: 60's." A pawnshop burns down, ruining fake jewelry, clothes, and stolen furs. Next, a cheap furniture shop goes up in flames, destroying such things as a leopard-print sofa. The riot spreads to Detroit and New York. Emotions of all those around it rise. The police strive to find a scapegoat. They blame the black men, and some are shot to appease the anxiety of the police.

"We Saw Beyond Our Seeming" admits that the people of the narrator have some responsibility in the hanging of men and the starvation of children of their own race. The guilt comes not from action, but from lying about their knowledge, also from remaining silent. The guilt kills their souls. The narrator of "Black Ode" realizes the cultural beauty of a lover using speech and religion. "No No No No" points to various items of injustice, written to America. It uses instances of Vietnam, immigration, racial injustice, and poverty. The narrator rejects this heritage and vows not to help.

The narrator of "My Guilt" speaks of a common feeling of guilt from not suffering enough. The narrator worries that others have given more to the cause for equality. A man with an identity crisis goes through many nicknames in "The Calling of Names." Many racial slurs and their various meanings are discussed. "On Working White Liberals" tells of the only thing worth dying for: correcting injustice. The society of the narrator fails to strive for this goal. The falseness of a high fashion show is revealed in "Sepia Fashion Show." No amount of money or fashion truly covers the rude habits of the runway models. The narrator vows not to aspire to such habits.

"The Thirteens (Black)" contains thirteen different lines, pointing out the negative aspects of an underprivileged society. Drugs and violence abound. Likewise, "The Thirteens (White)" points out many of the same problems in privileged society. Even when everything appears to look good, immorality and hidden wrongs abound. A playful game describes serious personal problems in "Harlem Hopscotch." In the end, the speaker crosses a line, to which she remarks, "I think I won."

Part Two: "Just Before the World Ends" Analysis

The speaker of the poem "When I Think About Myself" possesses an irony, while talking about yet another irony. He/she laughs at the situation of his/her life, though most people would be frustrated and angry. The life itself is ironic, because, though he/she has worked hard, younger people have advanced farther. The second to last line could be taken two ways. The narrator laughs until crying, which may signal much hilarity. On the contrary, it may reveal the narrator's true feelings about the state of his/her life. The bomb in "On a Bright Day, Next Week," alludes to the atom bomb, to be sure, which destroyed what was a normal day for hundreds of thousands of people. Other, symbolic bombs fall upon humanity all over the world. Perhaps, as in the second stanza, the bomb is that of lack of sympathy, as the tears dry up. Alternatively, as in the last stanza, the fallout is not a negative, but mercy right where it is needed. "Jim" receives advice in "Letter to an Aspiring Junkie." The common name applies in an "everyman" way. The drugs are referred to as "smoke," "monkey," and "conk." The writer admits that someone spends all his or her hopes for tomorrow for a high today. The ride of a drug high is compared to that of riding a lion, in the form of a simile.

Imagery lies at many levels in "Miss Scarlett, Mr. Rhett, and Other Latter-Day Saints." The very imagery, alone, such as Golgotha and the stigmata, are graphic in nature. Added to that, the violence endured by the slaves at the hands of their owners, and the images take on new meaning. The writer shows that while some revere characters such

as Scarlett O'Hare, she represents much pain and negativity to entire populations of their neighbors. The form and cadence of the poem "Times-Square-Shoeshine-Composition" is very musical. It alludes to rap music in its syncopation and use of environmental rhythm. The speaker of the poem uses irony when he will not come down in price, calling himself a "bigot." Perhaps what he says could also be attributed to the business practices of many of his customers.

Stark contrasts make up "Faces." A gun pointed in the face of a doll symbolizes anger at the man's childhood. On the surface, the childhood seems ideal, with closeness to his mother and dear playthings. Something, however, turned all that to hate as he looks back in adulthood. The narrator tells of a poet's prophecy, also. This, though, helps no one, as no ones sees. The poem leaves more questions than it answers. "To a Freedom Fighter" alludes to the beating of Christ, with the nature of the whip, and, more clearly, through the reference to a bitter drink. The person receiving the beating, by fighting for freedom, becomes a savior to some. The narrator does not watch from afar, but remains intimately close to the victim. He/she can sip tears from his/her check and listen to his/her breath as he/she sleeps.

The images used in "Riot: 60's" bring to mind vivid and emotional memories for many, not only in the riots themselves, but also in the references to icons and beliefs of the day. The final two verses contrast the violence of the riots and the violence of the police with the stereotypical southern charm and hospitality. The black man that the police finally catch appears to be innocent, full of southern grace. Six pairs of couplets tell, in simple words, the guilt the narrator feels in "We Saw Beyond Our Seeming." Each rhyming couplet bears its own subject within the plot of the poem. "Black Ode" alludes to biblical stories. It also uses some unusual adjectives, such as "moist sounds." Allusion and out-right historical reference abound in "No No No No." Referring to both religion and politics, no one escapes the blame for the sad state of the narrator's society.

"My Guilt" uses references to history and unknown quotes to communicate the emotions felt by the narrator. History and stereotypes meet political correctness in "The Calling of Names." An irony lies in the title, in that many times people do not want to be called names. This man, though, seeks the name that truly reflects who he is. "On Working White Liberals" shows failures of society in a shortened, modified sonnet form. The rhyme carries throughout the stanzas. Very interesting rhymes catch the reader's attention in "Sepia Fashion Show." The stanzas flow with a rhythm much like the walk of the runway models they discuss. The narrator points out that society is becoming wise to the fake beauties in the fashion industry. The two poems, "The Thirteens (Black)" and "The Thirteens (White)" shows that money does not solve problems. Many of the problems could be solved, however, if the two sides concentrated on the issues and not on slighting each other. "Harlem Hopscotch" flows with the lyrical quality of many children's rhymes. However, the speaker matures throughout the poem. The reader assumes that in talking about crossing the line, the speaker no longer refers to games. In winning, he/she no longer struggles in the same way that he/she did growing up.

"Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well" Part One

"Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well" Part One Summary

In "Pickin Em Up and Layin Em Down," a man reminisces about traveling the country and loving many women. He lives by the adage that the grass is greener on the other side. Yet again, in "Here's to Adhering" someone seeks the ideal mate; this time a man. Parts of him lay everywhere, but the whole package remains elusive. A different kind of struggle, aging, is addresses in "On Reaching Forty." The only way to escape the aging process, according to the speaker, is to die young. Finally, "The Telephone" tells of a poor soul waiting all week for a phone call. Though the telephone lines connect many other people, his/hers refuses to ring.

"Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well" Part One Analysis

"Picking Em Up and Laying Em Down" uses a lyrical chorus to add whimsy to a serious poem. The sad search for true loves continues in "Here's to Adhering." The theme of traveling the world in search of true love is classic. "On Reaching Forty" personifies age very well as something that possesses thoughts and emotions. In fact, it is very pushy. The twist at the end lies in the escape from aging, which, ironically, is death. Personification appears once again in "The Telephone." The object appears to be something that willfully connects two people. The phone decides who receives joyful news, and who sits in silence.

"Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well" Part Two

"Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well" Part Two Summary

The poet compares a fair-skinned person to a dark-skinned person in "Passing Time." She once again visits the pain of lost love in "Now Long Ago." The speaker wishes for the time before he/she knew the pain of lost love. "Greyday" tells of one long sad day, in which someone dear is missed. A girlfriend, who loses her man to another woman, regrets that, when she sees the same thing happen to the new woman, she cannot intervene. She laments the situation in "Poor Girl." The speaker of "Come, And Be My Baby" vows to rescue his/her lover from the world of addiction and destitution.

"Sense of Insecurity" tells of someone that defines life by his or her loves. All meaning filters through the interactions with his/her lover. Relationships are paramount in "Alone," however. The chorus says "nobody/Can make it out here alone," and the verses illustrate this fact. In "Communication I," a woman listens as a man breaks off their relationship. He uses many, flowery words to get the point across. "Communication II," marked "For Adele," describes the feelings of a student and a teacher. Though the teacher feels passionately about her subject, the student retains little of the information. The poet wonders about the worth of a day in "Wonder." He/she surmises that immortality may or may not lie in the written word. "A Conceit" wonders about the power of poetry also. The author offers a guided tour of the power, better, the author claims, than a lonely trip.

"Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well" Part Two Analysis

"Passing Time" uses simile to compare skin color to times of day. The poem points out the similarities in the differences of the two people. Time also appears in "Now Long Ago." The speaker reflects on the passage of seasons along with the passing of love. It could be real or figurative that the love bloomed in the spring. Days are personified in "Greyday." Biblical allusions are also used. "Poor Girl" uses a short chorus of "Poor Girl/Just like me." In fact, the speaker calls it a song, in the last stanza. A short chorus is also used in "Come, And Be My Baby." The chorus, also the title, will solve all the problems and provide an escape from the nastiness of the world.

New literary devices are employed in "Senses of Insecurity." Homophones appear throughout, as does internal rhyme. Once again, chorus is used in "Alone." This poem uses repetition even further than its predecessors do. "Communication I" uses a very free form. All the stanzas are different lengths and the lines are without the usual meter.

The order of "Communication II" seems strange to the reader. The student's disinterest comes before the explanation of the teacher's passion. The personified day in "Wonder" weaves through a life that ends in a flophouse. The wish of immortality is a theme as old as time itself. "A Conceit" opens a dialogue between the reader and the poet. This approach makes the reader feel personally recognized.

"Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well" Part Three

"Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well" Part Three Summary

"Request" pleads for the father of a country, assumedly America, to come forward and give the "bastard" country a proper name. The poetry describes another country in "Africa." This country starts majestic, but falls to ruin through modernization. The country theme continues in "America," in which America's potential is described, but lamented. According to this description, the true goodness remains hidden. The reader returns to Africa in "For Us, Who Dare Not Dare." A tour of the beautiful and proud landscape sweeps from the Nile, through the Congo, and down the jungle.

The spiritual is explored in "Lord, in My Heart." The narrator vows, though he/she values religion, he/she cannot follow the golden rule. If struck, he/she would strike back. The final poem of part three, "Artful Pose" laments love poetry. The author bemoans others' ability to write love poetry freely. This author, though, can only write of broken hearts and wrath.

"Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well" Part Three Analysis

The poet utilizes direct address in "Request," alongside extended metaphor. The country shares traits with those of an illegitimate child. "Africa," on the other hand, demonstrates personification. The continent possesses hair, feet, breasts, and tears. Likewise, the poet gives it emotions, such as pain. The overall form changes in "America," which uses couplets, with an intertwining rhyme scheme throughout. Finally, "For Us, Who Dare Not Dare" appeals to the senses. The poet appeals to sight and sound, along with touch and taste.

"Lord, in My Heart" uses much Biblical allusion. The form includes couplets; the final line of each two couplets rhymes. Free form, however, is used in "Artful Pose." The poem discusses personal motivation for a writer, more specifically, a poet.

"Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well" Part Four

"Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well" Part Four Summary

The heart of a modern day couple is dissected in "The Couple." Without fear, hate, and greed, both the man and woman in question would be of no account. Continuing the inspection of seedier characters, "The Pusher" describes a drug dealer. The man misquotes Malcolm X. In peddling his trade, he delivers a fate to young Blacks that is worse than death. Yet another character receives an in-depth look in "Chicken-Little." A woman retreats into solitude, out of fear. She dies of loneliness, and no one misses her.

"Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well" Part Four Analysis

Stripped of their baser emotions, the subjects of "The Couple" possess no redeeming qualities. They deceive themselves and exclude themselves from society. "The Pusher" uses literature and history to illustrate the dangers in corrupt knowledge. Though Malcolm X and Martin Luther King inspired many, many good actions, this dealer uses their knowledge out of context to push his own twisted agenda. Perhaps fear of the types of people so far discussed in this section frightened the woman in "Chicken-Little" into her solitude. The irony of the poem lies in her death. In trying to protect herself, she brought on her own demise.

"Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well" Part Five

"Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well" Part Five Summary

"I Almost Remember" tells of a television viewer, who, after being saddened by images of starving children, ceases to smile. While he becomes a prisoner in his own home, the subject of "Prisoner" actually describes his time in jail. The noises of the prison haunt the man.

The subject matter turns in "Woman Me," which describes a beautiful woman. The beauty of the woman, inside and out, inspires children. "John J." tells of another individual, this time a boy, rejected by his mother. No amount of outside love or vices fills the emptiness of his mother's rejection. Hope revives in "Southeast Arkanasia," however. The horrors of the past, though insidious, can be forgiven. More hurts of the past are discussed in "Song for the Old Ones." The author attempts to understand why his/her ancestors submitted to untold cruelty. Finally, he/she realizes that self-preservation was their noble cause. Sorrow flows deeper, however, in "Child Dead in Old Seas." Not only does it appear that the child dies in this account, but the father also. The two lost souls seek one another in the deep, cold ocean.

"Take Time Out" encourages the reader to empathize with those on the margins of society, such as a soldier, a hippie, and a junkie. This poem strives to connect various members of society. "Elegy," however, strives to connect society with its past. Written for Harriet Tubman and Fredrick Douglass, this poem gives meanings to these two noble deaths. The deceased speak from the grave, promising that their deaths serve as fertilizer for the growth of the next generation. The reader is once again implored to learn from the past in "Reverses." In keeping with the theme of heritage, a little girl proclaims pride in her parents in "Little Girl Speakings." Finally, "This Winter Day" tells of a time of making soup, ending this book with a lighthearted metaphor.

"Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well" Part Five Analysis

The power of the media is one of the influences that haunt the narrator in "I Almost Remember." It seems, though, that over time, any exposure to the greater sufferings in the world is enough to steal one's smile. Moreover, while "Prisoner" definitely describes an actual jail, it can also be read as a figurative account. The speaker feels trapped by old men, in an institution of some sort. His whole life falls to the schedule of the institution, perhaps like that of a corporate man, or student.

"Woman Me" uses a classic catalogue form in praising the beauty of the subject. The first verse starts with her smile and proceeds down her body to her thighs. It then continues outward, to characteristics beyond physical beauty. Repetition, once again, provides emphasis in "John J." The ominous "his momma didn't want him" drives each stanza. "Southeast Arkanasia" invites the reader to participate, in asking questions at the end of each verse. It also employs historical references, mingled with sensory phrases. A more general historical account is used in "Song for the Old Ones." The knowledge of the previous generation is passed down, enabling the younger generation to look back at a harsh history with pride. "Child Dead in Old Seas" moves hauntingly in the voice of the dead child. The childlike trust in the protection and rescue by his father appears frozen in eternity.

Repetition and almost rap are employed to bring a unique rhythm to "Take Time Out." The dead talk in "Elegy." The age-old question of what the dead would say if they could speak proves to be a powerful voice for this poet. "Reverses" also seeks to learn from the past, but uses opposites to illustrate this point. The dialect of a young, Black girl adds emotion to "Little Girl Speakings." The natural pride of a young girl in her parents shines clearly. Each part in this collection ends with a decidedly more lighthearted piece. The poem "This Winter Day" is no exception. It uses the serious metaphor of death to illustrate the frivolous chore of making soup on a cold day.

And Still I Rise, Part One: "Touch Me, Life, Not Softly"

And Still I Rise, Part One: "Touch Me, Life, Not Softly" Summary

"A King of Love, Some Say" tells the story of an abused lover. The writer equates all love with the pain of abuse. A type of love plays out again in "Country Lover." Romantic love it is not, but a more casual relationship. "Remembrance" calls to mind a previous love, that is now gone. Continuing in this theme, "Where We Belong, A Duet" expresses the joy of a couple finally in love, after a lifetime of searching.

The well-known "Phenomenal Woman" shows a woman proud of her gender. She does not claim to be perfect in societal terms. She does, however, possess many redeeming characteristics. Her physical beauty is not overlooked, but the description flows deeper, to emotional and relational strengths as well. "Men" would seem to be a matching poem to the proceeding, but it is not. The female narrator reflects on the sly workings of men to draw her into an abusive relationship. In the end, the woman decides hiding in loneliness is better than risking the hurt, both physical and emotional.

"Refusal" shows hope as the narrator vows that fate will, one day, draw him/her to his/her true love. Contrarily, "Just for a Time" looks back on a past love, without regret. This poem illustrates the adage of better to love and lose.

And Still I Rise, Part One: "Touch Me, Life, Not Softly" Analysis

Rhetorical questions frame the verses of "A King of Love, Some Say." In "Country Lover," the poet lists the pleasures of a casual lover, enjoying a weekend. The memories go deeper in "Remembrance," as the name suggests. The narrator remembers the touch and smell of her lover. The song form of "Where we Belong, A Duet" seems to be sung in unison by both lovers. The uplifting tone offers a pleasant change from many of the previous pieces.

The woman speaking in "Phenomenal Woman" catalogues her own attributes, though not in the usual order. The chorus reinforces the strength the poet strives to convey. "Men" covers an unknown passage of time, in which the innocence of a girl is stolen. It tells the story of a possibility, one that may have only happened in the mind of the woman watching men pass on the street.

The possibility of true love is explored in "Refusal." The narrator refuses to accept life without love, though no such true love has presented itself. He/she still holds hope for

the soul mate that exists somewhere. The same attitude looks back in the following poem. "Just for a Time" utilizes a steady rhyme scheme in the memories it invokes.

And Still I Rise, Part Two: "Traveling"

And Still I Rise, Part Two: "Traveling" Summary

Part Two opens with "Junkie Monkey Reel," a sad account of the results of drug abuse. The uses slowly falls apart, from the shoulders, to the arms, then knees and finally, internally, with the brain. The sad diagnosis of life continues in "The Lesson." The poet claims that living only allows a perpetual state of dying. The only reason to endure such tragedy is the love of life. A man visits more decay in "California Prodigal." He explores the ruins of ancient civilizations. The more recent past is visited in "My Arkansas." The poet reveals Arkansas' violent past. The society there continues to live in the past, holding to tradition and hauling along with it "old crimes."

As the reader travels from the past to the present, "Though the Inner City to the Suburbs" travels out of town. Watching from the train window, the observer in this poem notices that the poor, though appearing to be downtrodden, possess more happiness than those with more material goods in the suburbs. The critique of the middle class continues in "Lady Luncheon Club." The women endure what is expected of them in their suburban lives, though the speaker proves boring and the food bad. An entirely different kind of woman speaks in "Momma Welfare Roll," however. A crass woman, proud of her station in society, takes all the welfare system has to offer. In return, she raises children who are thieves.

In "The Singer Will Not Sing," the reader must wait until the end to understand the meaning of the title. The singer, though desiring to sing, has come to the performance too late. "Willie," likewise, falls on hard times and bad timing. However, he makes the best of his life. Though, on a worldwide scale, he appears insignificant, he realizes he gives power to powerful leaders because he willingly follows.

"To Beat the Child Was Bad Enough" illustrates the gruesome reality of child abuse and neglect. A child, unsupervised, pulls over a pot of boiling water. Many details remain unsaid. Someone, in the end, drowns. Cruelty of a different sort is listed out like a grocery list in "Woman Work." The woman lists all that she must do. In return, she only receives that which costs nothing, such as the sun and moon. The worth of a worker in "One More Round" echoes the feelings of the woman speaking in the previous poem. The poet decries that he/she does not oppose hard work, provided honest pay follows.

Loneliness once again appears in "The Traveler." A friendless drifter bemoans the long travels of his/her life. In "Kin," the narrator once had a friend, but betrayal leaves them both lonely. The poem connects all humanity in a Biblical sense. A visceral memory comes in a dream-like state in "The Memory." Night holds more promise than day, which only brings heartache.

And Still I Rise, Part Two: "Traveling" Analysis

"Junkie Monkey Reel" describes the devolution of the drug addict. The rot of the body of the user also represents the corruption that such habits introduce into society. The sad critique of society continues in "The Lesson," which explores the meaning of life. An answer is not reached, but a determination to continue on, just as time always has. "California Prodigal" can be viewed as figurative. The man explores ruins, which are physical, but may stand for the mental or spiritual. The poet describes phantoms that haunt the place the man visits, where perhaps his own ghosts have driven him. More clear figurative symbols appear in "My Arkansas." The "ante-bellum lace" of the memories of the past has be torn, but retained.

The impact of urban sprawl plays out in "Through the Inner city to the Suburbs." Though it appears to be one person viewing a trip into the suburbs, it also represents the trek of many previous inhabitants of the inner city to the suburbs. Though they thought they were unhappy in the city, the real misery lies in the manicured lawns of the suburbs. In a delightful turn, "Lady Luncheon Club" employs humor to explore the same themes. The misery is more subtle, such as the progressive boredom of the luncheon attendees. "Momma Welfare Roll" strikes an ironically humorous chord. Though the woman described in the beginning does not seem to have much going for her, she strikes back with pride in her lifestyle.

Anticipation builds in "The Singer Will Not Sing." One assumes the "will" means a refusal. In the end, it is an opportunity lost, as one hears of all the preparation the singer has done, which must remained bottled inside because she is too late. It speaks the missed opportunities to which many readers relate. "Willie" shares a dialogue with the narrator. He explains how he retains his pride, despite his insignificance. He echoes the title of the collection, "And Still I Rise."

"To Beat the Child Was Bad Enough" shares a sketchy, though painful, description of the horrific death of a child. A laundry list form is used in "Woman Work." The poem also travels through the seasons, as the woman claims all the natural beauty of the earth as her payment for her services. The theme of honest pay for hard work continues in "One More Round." Chorus and dialect are also used to communicate the plight of the blue-color worker.

The reader gets the rare treat of alliteration in "The Traveler." The lines read simply and lyrically. Allusions to ancient accounts of the dawn of humanity tie all women together in "Kin." References include Eve and Lilith, two separate accounts of the first woman. "The Memory" uses metaphors of growing crops to contrast the dead-tiredness of the body. The person feels shame to be alive.

And Still I Rise, Part Three: "And Still I Rise"

And Still I Rise, Part Three: "And Still I Rise" Summary

The inspiration "Still I Rise" praises the resilience of the human race. In the face of faulty accounts of history, the speaker vows to succeed. Heritage receives more praise in "Ain't That Bad." The word, bad, is used in a slang way in a positive sense, emphasizing the culture of the people the poem praises. This culture is not only unique in their language, but also in their food and music. "Life Doesn't Frighten Me" echoes back to the history of the previous poems. The narrator is not afraid of life, despite ghosts from the past.

The narrator in "Bump d'Bump" remains ignorant of the truth of his/her heritage. He/she is repressed by lack of knowledge and cultural stereotypes. Knowledge, however, earns the speaker in "On Aging" the right to sit back and rest. He/she implores the younger generations to refrain from pity and coddling of the elderly. The aged have earned the right to slow down, and it is more a choice than a medical necessity. "In Retrospect" continues to look back, remunerating what was missed in a year spent in love. The lovers were blinded to the beauty of the seasons by their consuming love.

"Just Like Job" vows to trust people despite hardships. Heartfelt prayers implore the deity to uphold his promise of protection and leadership. The poet writes of someone who cannot fail in "Call Letters: Mrs. V.B." All of life holds possibility, except the possibility of failure. The poet once again writes in prayer form in "Thank You, Lord." He/she sees a vision of god much like him/herself. The receiver of the prayers appears to her as a Malcolm X type character. The speaker then thanks the deity for a new day.

And Still I Rise, Part Three: "And Still I Rise" Analysis

Symbols of riches in "Still I Rise," such as oil and gold, illustrate the pride the speaker has in his/her heritage. The resilience of the human race is celebrated. Slang and dialect reflect the same proud heritage in "Ain't That Bad." The rich culture includes such icons as Jesse Jackson and Pearlie Bailey. "Life Doesn't Frighten Me" includes a verse form with a chorus and tag ending. Life is not to be feared because the speaker holds a secret charm, which remains secret within the poem, but it concerns all ghosts of the past.

Education remains the key in "Bump d'Bump," though the speaker has been held down by a faulty education. Ability is not only in knowledge and in money, however, but in attitude. Meanwhile, no redeeming qualities are given for aging in "On Aging." Despite this, the author beseeches the reader to respect the elderly. "In Retrospect" ironically includes vivid memories of a change of seasons that the narrator supposedly missed

while in love. One assumes that the lover was not as distracted as he/she felt, which might offer clues to the demise of the relationship.

Most obvious in "Just Like Job" is the Biblical allusion, which uses a prayer form. The penitent feels severely afflicted but vows to overcome. Though he/she feels the strength comes from without, a great deal of power lies within. Strength also shines in "Call Letters: Mrs. V.B." Each verse shares a formulaic similarity. Prayer form returns in "Thank You, Lord." Though the speaker holds an unorthodox view of his/her deity, his/her faith is universal.

"Shaker, Why Don't You Sing?"

"Shaker, Why Don't You Sing?" Summary

"Awaking in New York," tells not only of the awakening of the narrator, but of the whole city. The life pulsates so steadily that the narrator feels the entire city awaken with him/her. A different kind of pervading feeling develops in "A Good Woman Feeling Bad." The woman tells of the emotions of many depressing times. The cause is omitted, leaving a universal feeling to the poem.

A lovely, light-hearted "The Health-Food Diner" tells of a carnivore trapped in a vegetarian climate. The first four verses read like a menu, with asides in which the speaker wishes for meat. Finally, he/she breaks loose to catalog all of his/her favorite meat dishes, all served in the smoking section.

Pleading for peace, "A Georgia Song" addresses the largest cities in Georgia. The poem talks of the great and the tragic aspects of much of the south, as seen in Georgia. The poet claims the time has come for peace and change. While the previous poem talked of the aging of a society, "Unmeasured Tempo" talks of the aging of a woman. It seems, in one day, while waiting for someone to arrive, the woman progresses from young and nubile to old and wrinkled.

The man in "Amoebaean for Daddy" tells of a man who worked himself to an early grave. He lives a hard life, as a waiter on a train. He strives to give his wife the best, even if he must steal it. His wife, however, is ashamed of him, and his daughter thinks he should have died sooner, perhaps because of her own shame. "Recovery," though, tells of a somewhat happier conclusion. Though the narrator has lost love in the past, he/she loves again, against the odds. Love takes center stage for the woman poet in "Impeccable Conception." The writer being described possesses an innate ability to write stirring, romantic poetry about the most mundane of objects. The poet, though, lives alone.

The subject in "Caged Bird" does the only thing he can do: sings. Though he cannot fly or even walk easily, he holds hope of freedom. The free bird does as it pleases him, taking his freedom for granted. Caught in a different way, a mother reacts to the tears of her son in "Avec Merci, Mother." The poet does not explain why the son offers this thanks to the mother so receives the adoration of the crowds so proudly. One could assume, though, that the father has passed away, as he is only there in the face of his son. More adoration resounds in "Arrival." All of creation celebrates the arrival of someone, who arrives at the door just as the poem closes.

To the narrator in "A Plagued Journey," the day represents hope, while the night holds fear. Fear encompasses in the night like an intruder, only driven out by the sunrise. Day passes very quickly, however, and the fear returns. A mother prays for relief in "Starvation." She pleads for good news, though nothing specific. Perhaps an end to the

agony is all she desires. Poverty once again appears in "Contemporary Announcement." The two verses contrast a hale month with a lean month. When the money is available for rent, the family greets the landlord happily. The month when they are in want, however, they must hide from the landlord when he comes to collect.

"Prelude to a Parting" speaks of someone who fears love. To prevent the pain of loss, ther person simply refuses love from the start. A different kind of pitiful person is addressed in "Martial Choreograph." A naive, young sailor appears to be deceived about the nature of his mission. Only experience can prepare him for the carnage that waits.

The speaker in "To a Suitor" implores potential lovers to strive for the criteria as he/she lays them out. If the requirements are met, the speaker promises to be a worthwhile lover. "Insomniac," as would be expected, tells of a person chasing sleep. The pain of sleeplessness hurts the seeker worse than shame. The speaker in "Weekend Glory," however, revels in all aspects of his/her simple life. Though many, seemingly more successful people ridicule the blue-collar life, the speaker of this poem extols the virtues of a life with fewer financial obligations.

The narrator of "The Lie" lies by deceit. The narrator pretends that the departure of a companion suits the narrator's interests, and holding back painful tears and pleas helps the departing lover pack. Next, the poet prescribes a way to avoid such heartache. Loving from a distance might save the lover the pain of inevitable loss. A different pain is addressed in "Family Affairs." A Black woman resists the platitudes of society. The wounds of injustice are too fresh to her. She still remembers all that was ripped from her ancestors in Africa.

Emotions prove to be fickle in "Changes." Comfort and peace fly about like so many birds. Confidence also proves indecisive, especially when pitted against love. Innocence continues the fickle theme in "Brief Innocence." In the faint light of dawn, the entire world seems innocent. Finally, "The Last Decision" tells of an elderly person who gives up living. The entire world falls against the person. The faculties of the body begin to fail. While suicide is not clearly stated, the joy from life is gone.

In "Slave Coffle,' hope is lost as a slave must return home after seeing freedom just beyond reach. One lover questions the silent partner in "Shaker, Why Don't You Sing?" All the movements of the lover's body are musical, yet the lover does not utter a word. Sadness returns, as in the opening poem of this collection. The speaker in "My Life Has Turned to Blue" sits sad and alone and must wait for spring to bring the return of the speaker's lover. It seems all the good in the world, from the flowers to the birds, leaves along with the lover.

"Shaker, Why Don't You Sing?" Analysis

"Awaking in New York" holds one obvious irony. The poet observes the awakening of a city that never sleeps. In this, rejuvenation can be seen in even the most unlikely of

places. Many layers of comparison are used in "A Good Woman Feelings Bad." The blues is personified, which, in turn, uses simile. Rhyme also flows throughout the poem. The poet descries the feeling of sadness for anyone, regardless of the cause.

Humor is the most obvious device in "The Health-Food Diner." The poem reflects not only a marginal population that thrives on the vegetarian lifestyle, but the increased pressure on mainstream society to give up its vices.

Tradition resists change in "A Georgia Song." The wrongs of the people weigh heavily on the icons of the old south, such as Tara and magnolia trees. Love overrules much knowledge in "Unmeasured Tempo." Time could be substituted for tempo in this poem, as the endless day ages the waiting woman beyond her years.

In "Amoebaean for Daddy," a demeaned man searches for meaning in his life. His family, much like his society, looks down on him, despite his efforts. His daughter wishes for an early death for him, out of either pity or apathy. "Recovery" shows the power of love. This theme occurs often in this collection, though not always in such a positive light. Irony comes out in "Impeccable Conception" in that the woman writing communicates so clearly about something that she does not experience: love. She spends so much time writing that she has no time for relationships.

"Caged Bird" echoes the theme of hope. No matter how dire the situation, there is always hope. The cage symbolizes many things that may tie a person down, such as poverty, abuse, or racism. "Avec Merci," French for "with thanks," shows the epitome of success. The reason for the thanks, though, is left unsaid. The son cries, presumably with pride, and the mother revels in her fame. The subject of "Arrival" seems almost God-like when greeted. The description could be read as sincere or sarcastic.

An extended metaphor in "A Plagued Journey" illustrates a gripping fear of life. The period of day, or hope, lasts more briefly than the night, or fear. "Starvation" has a definite sarcastic ring to it. The mother, perhaps mad from fear and want, welcomes any relief. Desperation also plagues the family in "Contemporary Announcement." This family practices situation morality, driven by poverty. Irony once again plays in "Prelude to a Parting," though the narrator admits this irony. The narrator would rather avoid love than suffer the parting of loved ones. Finally, "Martial Choreograph" condemns the violence that will inevitably steal the innocence of this young sailor.

The speaker in "To a Suitor" briefly talks of interracial relationships, as one of her criteria is that the lover be black. Insomnia is personified in "Insomniac." The free verse poem expresses the frustration, like pain, of the person chasing sleep. Contrarily, the speaker in "Weekend Glory" enjoys life and criticizes corporate America, citing that many upper middle class people who look down on her also work paycheck to paycheck to pay for all their luxuries.

The liar in "The Lies" lies not only to his/her lover, but also to self. In practicing this tactic, ignoring the truth may make it easier to cope. "Prescience" prescribes a cure for heartache in avoiding love altogether. This reflects a timeless desire to love and be

loved in return and to avoid pain at all costs. In parable form, "Family Affairs" uses the story of two women to show the struggles between different races for centuries. In the end, not all the hurt can be soothed so quickly with words.

Metaphor appears in "Changes." Each verse contains an emotion and its metaphorical counterparts. "Brief innocence" acknowledges the evil potential in us all, which lies dormant in the dawn. A dismal ode to old age plays out in "The Last Decision," as one elderly person decides to stop living. Life could be metaphorical, though, as in the joy of life or the participation in life.

A coffle is a chain gang made up of prisoners or slaves. Visually, "Slave Coffle" uses interesting capitalization, as the second word in each verse is also capitalized, almost personifying those terms. The title poem of this section, "Shaker, Why Don't You Sing?" seems to tell of a lover crying for more intimacy from their partner. Color paints the picture of "My Life Has Turned to Blue." With the love relationship of the spring, summer and fall, all the colors are used up. All that remains for a lonely winter is blue.

"I Shall Not Be Moved"

"I Shall Not Be Moved" Summary

"Worker's Song" tells of the life of a factory worker. Though often overlooked, the worker contributes much to society. Continuing the connection of humanity theme, "Human Family" points out that all people share similarities. Yet everyone contributes to the world through his/her unique nature. Negative aspects of society come out, though, in "Man Bigot." In short order, the poet declares that the worst thing in the world is a bigot. "Old Folks Laugh" delights in telling of the contentment of the elderly who cease to worry about what others think of them. A person who lives to this point and retains the ability to laugh has much to contribute yet.

The meaning of life comes into question in "Is Love." Between birth and death, the only meaningful thing, to this poet, may be love. The poem ends in a question. "Forgive" implores the place, Virginia, to accept the narrator's forgiveness. A life is changed on an otherwise insignificant day in "Insignificant." The speaker of the poem gets news from a nurse, though she is alone. Outside the world does not pause to notice her turmoil.

A woman speaks in "Love Letter." She reads the letter aloud and reminisces about a passionate time with her lover. They shared on physical and spiritual levels. "Equality" tells of the persistence of the desire to be free. The speaker questions how someone that denies equality to another person based on race can possibly understand that person's motivations. Sadly, "Coleridge Jackson" gives an account of domestic abuse in which violence breeds violence. Due to degradation at work, a man abuses his family. Though everyone disapproved of the man's actions, they all fail to see the cause, except for the abusive boss, who is proud.

In "Why Are They Happy People," those in question do not seem to be genuinely happy. The speaker insists that they act happy, despite injustice and violence against them. In "Son to Mother," the son represents people removed from their mother country. After enduring much violence and hardship, the stolen son vows revenge and seeks the mother's advice. "Known to Eve and Me" tells of a woman deeply heart by a man she loved. It appears that the adamic man that was her lover turned into the deceiving serpent.

America receives a harsh, though truthful, criticism in "These Yet to Be United States." The poet questions how and why the country involves itself in the affairs of the whole world, yet allows so much suffering within its own borders. A man summarizes the state of his family in "Me and My Work." Though he is not wealthy, he contentedly takes care of his family. He refuses sympathy under any title. The speaker in "Changing" admonishes a friend who no longer smiles. Though others laugh at his/her jokes, the narrator of the poem sees through the fazade.

"Born That Way" tells the sad story of a prostitute. In her childhood, her father sexually abused her, using bribery. She naturally followed a similar path in adulthood, assuming she was destined to be what she was. The narrator in "Televised" bemoans the violence on the evening news. As he/she watches during dinner, the suffering of starving children ruins the meal. A depressing account is given in "Nothing Much." The speaker catalogues his/her life and sums it up as nothing. Rising hope is once again the subject of "Glory Falls." Despite much negativity and animosity in the world, the human race grows and hope lives on the promise of tomorrow.

The poet expresses the oddities of the city in "London." The city, though far from the old British Empire, holds trophies from the past, such as the lions in Trafalgar Square. "Savior" records the plea for a true religion. The poet is tired of the hypocrisy of those claiming Christianity as their banner. "Many and More" expresses the need for true friendship. Even though lovers are plenty and fortune draws some, the narrator wishes for an honest relationship. As he/she prepares to move, the narrator of "The New House" wonders what part of his/her spirit resides in the old house. "Our Grandmothers" tells the every woman struggle for a place in the world. The woman in the poem flees from slavery through the Underground Railroad for the sake of her children. In the end, though, the woman is any woman faced with hardship who does the best she can with what she has.

A listener pleads in "Preacher, Don't Send Me" for a new kind of sermon. He/she realizes what matters in life and imagines paradise as a place where it all comes together. "Fightin' Was Natural" tells of a prizefighter and all he suffers. Considering all the pain and suffering involved, he can only describe life as "hell." Age brings with it the loss of love, according to "Loss of Love." The speaker vows not to quietly allow this to happen. The women in "Seven Women's Blessed Assurance" are of various ages and types, though they all possess enough charm to capture a man.

The speaker in "In My Missouri" suffers at the hands of a man in Missouri. For a while, this drives her from relationships with other men. Eventually, however, the company of good men causes her to realize that both types, good and bad, exist. She encourages women never to give up the quest for Mr. Right. "They Ask Why" answers two questions. First, a person working for minimum wage explains the hardships this creates. Second, the person strives to explain the love he/she feels to another. The pain of loss appears in "Ailey, Baldwin, Floyd, Killens, and Mayfield." The loss of a loved one compares to the fall of a great tree. In the end, however, the survivors have the chance of a better life and peace returns.

Repetition drives "In My Missouri." The rhythm it creates sets a steady, quick tempo. The two verses of "They Ask Why" do not seem to fit. They do both, however, strive to answer very tough questions. The first serves as a sort of parable for the second. "Ailey, Baldwin, Floyd, Killens, and Mayfield" contains a nearly-hidden metaphor. The comparison of the loved one and the tree appears separate unless the whole poem is considered together. The hope of the future, once again, is the theme.

"I Shall Not Be Moved" Analysis

Onomatopoeia appears in "Worker's Song." The chorus contains a rhythmic "Whoppa, Whoppa" that echoes the thunder of the machines. "Human Family" uses a definite form, with rhyming verses and a chorus to emphasize its theme of similarity. The poet uses a short, limerick style in "Man Bigot." "Old Folks Laugh" tries to describe the sounds of the aged. The lines vary in length, giving a feeling of tempo change.

"Is Love" explores the essential question of life, though it gives no answer. Detailed visual imagery in "Forgive" takes the reader to the places mentioned. The theme of the poem is nearly swallowed up in its descriptive language. Many questions are left unanswered in "Insignificant." This tendency, perhaps as a theme, appears more frequently in this section than in past sections. The subject of the news delivered by the nurse remains unknown, though it may be pregnancy, given the nurse does not seem too sad to share it.

"Love Letter" uses deep, rich imagery to describe the lover. The descriptions treat nearly all of the senses. The chorus in "Equality" emphasizes the theme, while the verses illustrate it. The story-like quality of "Coleridge Jackson" draws in the reader. The poem uses dialogue to bring the characters to life.

A sad, situational irony in "Why Are They Happy People?" addresses three people. Perhaps if the abused seem happy, the guilt lessens for the abuser. "Son to Mother" describes a people with a clear reason for war. The poem addresses the anger that injustice causes and the destruction that ultimately results. The poet in "Known to Eve and Me" uses layers of allusion. The clear comparison between the lovers and the creation story is foremost. In a twist, the man turns into the serpent, and the serpent, in a Dracula-like way, turns the woman into a cold-blooded creature as well.

The poet uses rhyme in "These Yet to Be United States" that lead the reader on the trek around the world. The intended audience for the criticism consists of the upper crust of society. "Me and My Work" uses dialect and other cultural references to bring the character to life. The short poem, "Changing," seems to come full circle, stating the problem, the evidence, and the problem once again.

A circular form appears again in "Born That Way," with the first and final verses the same. The poet attempts to explain how the woman ended up as a prostitute, blaming the abuse of the father. The power of the media invades the home in "Televised." Racial tones also come to play. Vivid imagery adds up to nothing in "Nothing Much." The visual form of "Glory Falls" strikes the reader as unusual. The humanity is emphasized.

"London" criticizes the colonizing nature of the British Empire. The poet uses prayer form in "Savior." The degradation of religion along with the ruin of society harshly becomes known. The power of friendship and true, honest love serves as the subject for "Many and More." "The New House" continues the contemplation of the spiritual world. Finally, "Our Grandmothers" illustrates the oneness of humanity, and points out the similarities in the struggles of many different lifestyles.

Rhyme flows through "Preacher, Don't Send Me" and gives it a song-like feel. The verses are each punctuated with the summary sentence. The whole poem mirrors this by repeating all three summary sentences in a row. The injustice of aging is a theme that occurs repeatedly in this collection. "Loss of Love" decries against the replacing of the old with the young. Age appears again in "Seven Women's Blessed Assurance," as does appearance. The assurance of these women lies within themselves, though the title alludes to a hymn.

"On the Pulse of Morning"

"On the Pulse of Morning" Summary

Though it was written for the first inauguration of President Bill Clinton, "On the Pulse of the Morning" addresses the entire human race. The earth itself first speaks, reminding the reader of the age of the planet. The earth then implores all people to stand proudly on a firm rock and cease from hiding in the darkness of the past. Next, a river speaks, calling to humanity to erase the boundaries that separate all the different peoples of the earth. Forsaking greed and cynicism will bring peace, promises the river. Finally, the tree speaks, vouching that next to the river, grounded in the rock, is a good and safe place to be. The past cannot be changed, but should not be forgotten, according to the tree. For all people, hope lies in the future. Much can be accomplished by extending friendship and courtesy to those who pass by daily.

"On the Pulse of Morning" Analysis

In addressing one nation, America, concerning the problems of the world, the poet at once exerts a confidence in that country and gives a responsibility to its people. The poem reads like a parable, in which the Rock, the River, and the Tree could stand for countless people throughout history. In mentioning "Give birth again/To the dream," and reading from the place of the inauguration, the poem echoes the famous speech of Dr. Martin Luther King. The theme of this poem ties this entire collection together: for each person, the future holds hope.

Characters

Everyman

Many of the poems have an "everyman" quality, leading the reader into the role of narrator. The tactic serves to personalize the topics of the poems and emphasize the themes. This tactic works well, as the author strives to point out the similarities in all people. By putting the reader into the poem, she shows that all readers share many of the same emotions when put into similar situations.

Some poems seem to speak as a woman; others are more ambiguous. The reader should be careful in assuming the identity of the narrator in each poem. Though the author is a woman, the narrator often appears genderless, which gives the poem a more universal meaning.

John J.

Appearing only in the poem by the same name, John J is a man seeking after man vices, due in part to the rejection of his mother.

Junkie

Drug use appears more than once, and never in a positive light. In both "Letter to An Aspiring Junkie" and "Junkie Monkey Reel," the subject is a person who illustrates the damaging effects of drugs.

Momma

The subject of "Momma Welfare Roll" may be an unsavory character, but she illustrates a pride that few possess. She takes handouts shamelessly and does not seem to relish in the role of mother.

Coleridge Jackson

The sad man in "Coleridge Jackson" suffers racial insults every day on the job. He takes it out on his family. He sees no other outlet for the abuse he receives, and society turns a blind eye to much of it.

Objects/Places

Harlem

Harlem represents a time of disadvantagement for the poet. The children play there, and think there is nowhere else to be. They mock someone that steps outside the lines.

Africa

Africa is pictured as a place of unspoiled beauty for a time. It is a land that cares for its inhabitants, both human and animal. Colonization ruins all of this, however. Many of the poem deal with this fact.

America

The poet writes of the United States as a sad country with a sordid past. The theme of hope still runs through the poem about America, however.

Drugs

Drugs bring about devastating effects, as the poet points out in a number of poems. Drug users feed upon society and ruin lives for personal gain.

Inner City

The inner city holds little for the minorities that live there. Contrastingly, the people of the impoverished inner city live happier lives than their suburban counterparts.

Diner

In one poem, the vegetarian diner brings about a humorous piece. The diner represents all the vices that society demands people give up.

London

Colonization long past, London remains a city clinging to the past. The people there carry on their lives, ignorant of the bloody past.

Cage

The cage in "Caged Bird" represents all sorts of oppression. Bars lock the bird in, but do not prevent him from seeing the freedom of the outside world. The bird observes free birds enjoying life. Songs of hope remain in the heart of the captive, however.

Television

Media creeps into the lives of the subjects of the poetry and usually brings about sadness. Suffering that otherwise would remain unknown comes right into the living room of the characters, interrupting the daily lives of the viewers.

Telephone

The telephone connects all manner of people. Angelou personified the phone as if the telephone itself had the power to choose who receives an uplifting call and who sits lonely and waiting.

Themes

Hope in the Future

In nearly every poem of this anthology, the theme of hope in the future appears. From the oppressed minority to the slave and even to the dead and dying, hope remains. When society seems to be falling apart, the chance for improvement lies within its members. The poet hopes for more freedom and more opportunity in the future. She also writes of better understanding and tolerance. Angelou pleads for change in the present in order to change the future.

"Still I Rise" illustrates this theme well by listing many injustices in life. Despite all that, the speaker of the poem vows to succeed, partly in spite of the hardships, and partly because of them. This poem, along with "Phenomenal Woman," shows a person who breaks the societal mold, yet thrives in a happy life. Often a poem laments those differences that make the person stand out; this poet celebrates these differences.

Some poems seem to go against this theme, yet can, upon further inspection, support it. "America" lists many negative aspects of American society, yet the final line begs the reader to discover the great promise the land holds. Despite all the ugliness history shows of America, the potential for greatness remains.

The anthology ends with a poem that shows the greatest example of this theme. "On the Pulse of the Morning" describes the future as a new day dawning. It instills courage in the hope for the new age. The brighter future can be started with just the smallest bit of kindness from one brave person.

Resilience

History demonstrates the resilience of the human race. The poet uses instances of oppression and abuse to show that people live and thrive in the more dire situations. "Still I Rise" revolves most obviously around this theme. The theme of resilience and the theme of hope in the future often go hand in hand. The resilience of enduring the hardships allows the character to hold out for hope.

"Caged Bird" also illustrates this theme. The bird, though restrained and beaten down, continues to sing for freedom. The life of the caged bird breeds rage and oppression. Though he is lonely and bitter, the song of hope cannot be taken from him. The bird represents all the people who hold out hope for a better future, and the song can be heard throughout the ages. Thus, even though they may never be free, they persist so that others may one day achieve freedom.

Another poem that follows this line of the theme is "Elegy." Written for abolitionists Harriet Tubman and Fredrick Douglass, the poem talks about the resilience of their

work, waiting even for generations to see their children blossom because of their own struggles.

Some ideas, however, prove resilient, even in a negative sense. The author pleads for intolerance and bigotry to end. The history of the south continues to pervade life, and people continue to support its ancient ideals. In "Man Bigot," she says that a bigoted person is the worst thing on earth. The bigotry, however, continues, as the play on words shows: bigot/begat. The bigotry reproduces itself. Abuse also resists time and change, as illustrated in "Coleridge Jackson." The ugliness of abuse cannot be stopped, as the abused becomes the abuser.

Lost Love

Many associate poetry with love, and this anthology is no different. However, many times the pain of love outweighs the benefits. The speakers in the poetry express great heartache and often wish that love could be avoided in order to avoid the accompanying heartache. Love often is compared to the seasons, lasting no longer than a spring, and always followed by a long, harsh winter. Sometimes the love appears happy for at time. In many poems, though, the lover is dishonest, and, in retrospect, the narrator sees that the entire affair was a sham. Each time love returns, though, the lovers appear blind to the inevitable heartache. In the end, there seems to be no way to avoid the pain that will accompany the love relationship.

"The Gamut" tells of the whole cycle of a love affair, beginning at daybreak and ending in night and death. The departure of the lover is like death. "When You Come to Me" and "Remembering" recalls a love already past that tears at the speaker's soul. The loss of love seems greater than the happiness of the affair.

In "Poor Girl," the woman remembers the loss of her lover to unfaithfulness, and she laments that the new woman will suffer the same fate. This poem, and others, such as "Prescience," lament that avoiding love, or loving from a distance are the only sure ways of avoiding the heartache of loss. Therefore, love in itself is not the negative, only the loss of it. The poet declares that loving from a distance is the only way to avoid the pain of the impending loss.

Poverty vs Wealth

In many poems, the author points out that wealth does not solve society's problems. In "The Thirteens (White)" and "The Thirteens (Black)," each side of society suffers from within. Though the "Black" side struggles with life on the streets and in the gutter, they are no worse off than the "White" side that is rife with immorality and hides shameful secrets behind money.

"Through the Inner City to the Suburbs," however, points out that the children of the inner city are happy, though the wealthy largely ignore them. Many move out to the suburbs for the opportunities the move brings, forsaking the culture and community of

the inner city scene. The next poem, "Lady Luncheon Club" further illustrates the dull love of a socialite, who must put in appearances at societal functions that are meaningless to her.

The happiness of the lower class is best described in "Weekend Glory." The blue-collar worker labors all week for a little fun on a Saturday night. The narrator realizes that the corporate worker cannot understand the motivation behind such a life. The narrator points out, though, that he/she is motivated only by self. The wealthy must work doubly hard to keep up with society, and often extends his/her finances beyond his/her means. On the other hand, the narrator makes enough to live happily, but not enough to worry about impressing others. The point lies not in the evil of wealth, but the unnecessary nature of it. A happy, fulfilled life takes precedence over financial success.

Style

Points of View

All points of view can be pointed out within this collection. The author uses each in a different way to draw the reader in and communicate the feelings of the poem.

First person point of view, told from the perspective of the narrator, using "I" and "me," can be seen in poems such as "Still I Rise," "Phenomenal Woman," and "A Conceit." Though the author is a woman, the reader should not assume that all narrators or speakers within the poem are women. While some, such as "Phenomenal Woman," obviously are, others are more ambiguous. The use of an unknown "I" applies the poem to a larger audience. Even the love poetry can be considered from either a male or a female point of view.

"A Zorro Man," "The Couple," and "John J." show varying types of third person. Which type of third person is often hard to decipher from the brevity of the poems. Others, however, such as "Coleridge Jackson" provide enough narrative to clearly be third person omniscient, in which the narrator knows the thoughts and feelings of all of the characters.

The rarely used second person, in which the subject is addressed as "you," appears in poems such as "Letter to an Aspiring Junkie." This type of direct address, though seldom used in narrative fiction, proves more useful in poetry to make the characters more real. Understandably, 'On the Pulse of the Morning" also uses second person, addressing the audience, as the poem was originally a speech read at the inauguration of President Bill Clinton.

Setting

Settings vary within the collection. Many of the poems could apply to different locales and situations. The reader should be careful not to assume a setting unless it is explicitly implied within the poem. On the other hand, the reader may apply many of the poems to the reader's own environment, as poetry often lends itself to this type of universalism.

Still other poems point out very specific places, such as Africa or America. Even certain states are mentioned, such as Arkansas and Georgia. Sometimes the place itself will speak. The setting is often personified, as the poet describes how the land cares for its own. In yet other poems, the land suffers from the errors of its inhabitants. These poems, such as "Georgia," the poet speaks to the land itself, offering advice, and support.

In the final piece, "On the Pulse of the Morning," the land itself teaches the lesson of togetherness and mutual respect. The tree, the river, and the rock address the reader, offering security and wisdom.

Throughout the poems, the time varies as well. Some poems, such as "Elegy," refer to a distant historical period before the author was born. Others, such as "Riot: 60's," mention a much more recent time of history. Many poems travel through time, using the past to teach lessons for changing the course of the future.

Language and Meaning

Language in Angelou's poetry is rich. Sensory words paint visual picture that include sight, sound, smell and more. The author strives to capture historical moments in vivid detail in poems such as "Riot: 60's." Emotions leap off the page in nearly every poem.

Certain words or phrases, such as "red-shoed priests" in "No No No No" are meant to strike emotional and personal meaning with the reader. Other language shocks with its frankness, such as "Your brother jonesed your cousin/in the back seat of the car." in "The Thirteens (White)."

Often, however, the language is purposefully vague. The message takes second place to the words themselves. Many of the poems have the feel of a sacred text, in that they can take on different meanings to different readers. The reader should be careful not to limit the scope of a poem to a certain type of person or place without specific references. The author often does not specify whether the narrator is a man or a woman.

Various devices, such as onomatopoeia, appear in this collection, such as in "Worker's Song." Other times, the poet uses the language itself to produce a rhythm much like music or rap. "Pickin Em Up and Layin Em Down" and "Ain't That Bad" use a colloquial language to produce a rhythmic chorus. The author often uses the language of a particular period or cultural group. The use of slang plays upon certain stereotypes to evoke pictures of that type of person in the mind of the reader.

Structure

Structures vary, with no two poems having the same structure. Accepted poetry forms do not appear in pure form, though modified forms of limerick, haiku, and sonnet are used. Modified sonnet form could be applied to "On Working White Liberals." "Tears" uses a widely-modified haiku for both verses.

Chorus, obviously, gives some poems a songlike feeling. Often, choruses are used, such as "Pickin Em Up and Layin Em Down." Such repetition emphasizes the life of the characters in the repetitious work of a blue-collar laborer. The repetition may also emphasize the theme, as in "Still I Rise." The reputation of the title phrase stresses the theme of resilience on the part of the narrator.

Free verse appears just as often as accepted form styles. Any number of poems, such as "To a Freedom Fighter," use free verse, drawing attention to the message instead of the language of the poem. "Awaking in New York" flows in free verse form, using only two sentences

Rhythms flow throughout many poems, while others read like a narrative. In "Coleridge Jackson," the poet employs a story, as she does in "Riot: 60's." These poems have all the element of a fictional story, from rising action, to climax, to resolution, though in a very abbreviated form.

Quotes

"If today I follow death,/go down its trackless wastes,/salt my tongue on hardened tears/for my precious dear time's waste/race/along that promised cave in a headlong /deadlong/hast,/Will you/have/the/grace/to mourn for/me?" "Mourning Grace" p.24

"Unless you have the inborn/wisdom/and grace/and are clever enough/to die at/thirty-nine." "On Reaching Forty" p.63

"Alone, all alone/Nobody, but nobody/Can Make it out here alone." "Alone" p. 75

"If this country is a bastard/will the lowdown mother user/who ran off/and left the woman/moaning in her/green delivery/please come back and claim/his love child." "Request" p. 83

"Autopsy read:/dead of acute peoplelessness." "Chicken-Licken" p. 97

"I almost remember/smiling some/years past" "I Almost Remember" p. 101

"I lie down in my grave/and watch my children/grow." "Elegy" p. 115

"'Cause I'm a woman/Phenomenally./Phenomenal woman. /That's Me." "Phenomenal Woman" p. 131

""They don't' give me welfare. /I take it."" "Momma Welfare Roll" p. 148

"You may write me down in history/With your bitter, twisted lies, /You may trod me in the very dirt/But still, like dust, I'll rise." "Still I Rise" p. 163

"Failure? /I'm not ashamed to tell it, /I never learned to spell it. /Not failure." "Call Letters: Mrs. V. B." p. 174

"Or any place that saves a space/For smoking carnivores." "The Health-Food Diner." P. 185

"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." "Caged Bird" p. 194

"My life ain't heaven/but it sure ain't hell. /I'm not on top/but I call it swell" "Weekend Glory" p. 207

"We are more alike, my friends, /than we are unalike." "Human Family" p. 225

"Here, on the pulse of this new day, /You may have the grace to look up and out/And into your sister's eyes, /And into your brother's face, /Your country, /And say simply/Very simply/With hope-/Good morning." "On the Pulse of the Morning" p. 273

Topics for Discussion

Readers often assume the speaker of the poem is the author. Chose one poem and assume a different speaker. How does this change the message of that poem?

Often, the poems refer to historical events. Which event mentioned do you think had the greatest impact on society? How does the poet view this event?

Racial tension appears frequently in the poetry. How does racism affect your life? What advice do you think the poet would give to you regarding this?

Discuss the symbolism in "Caged Bird." Mention the cage and the bird.

How would this poet view events happening right now? Choose a recent event and discuss why Angelou would be interested in it. Write a short poem, imitating her style and language.

Often, America receives harsh criticism in the poetry. Do you think Angelou is proud to be an American? What is the impact of this type of language?

"Still I Rise" tells of someone thriving in despite a hard life. What events have you or someone you know overcome? How did this tragedy make that person stronger?

If one poem would be made into a song, what type of music would it be? Who should perform it?

Match up three poems with a book or movie that uses the same themes. Why are these pairings appropriate? How would the accompanying book or movie explain or add to the poem?