

# **Mom & Me & Mom Study Guide**

## **Mom & Me & Mom by Maya Angelou**

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## Summary

"Mom & Me & Mom" by Maya Angelou is a memoir about the celebrated poet's relationship with her mother, Vivian Baxter. Vivian's parents were from Trinidad. Her father had stowed away on a banana boat and landed in Florida. He and his wife had six children. Her father was a man who believed in standing up for oneself and resorting to violence when necessary. He taught Vivian, the oldest, to fight like a boy. He depended on her to teach his sons how to fight and win.

Vivian met and married Bailey Johnson who was a veteran of World War I. The family was disappointed. They had high hopes for Vivian. They wanted her to marry a professional man – a doctor or lawyer. Bailey was just a fry cook. But, Vivian was strong-willed; so, she married him anyway. They had a son, Bailey, Jr., who was followed five years later by their daughter, Maya. Vivian was a young, beautiful woman who wanted excitement in her life. She didn't have time for kids. Besides she and Bailey, Sr., had grown apart since the kids were born. She decided to ship the kids off when Maya was just one. They went to live with their paternal grandmother in a small town in Arkansas called Stamps.

Annie Henderson was a kind, soft-spoken woman who took the kids into her home. She was the polar opposite of vivacious, aggressive Vivian. Maya and her brother lived with Annie for ten years. But, when Annie saw that fifteen-year-old Bailey was being harassed in the small racist town, she knew it was time for the kids to reunite with their mother in the more liberal city of San Francisco.

Although one part of Bailey idolized his mother, he had a lot of old resentments, too. To Maya, she was a complete stranger. Maya didn't remember a thing about her. Her heart was broken because she missed her small town and her gentle grandmother. Vivian was young and loud and laughed all the time and danced around to jazz music in the living room. Maya found her unappealing and could not for the longest time bring herself to call her "Mother."

Vivian was smart and knew what was going on with her daughter. She was patient and understanding. As the years passed, Vivian tried to prove herself again and again. She was a friend to Maya, and she wanted to become a good mother. Although Vivian's aggressive and even violent tendencies were off-putting to Maya, the young girl came to understand and admire her mother.

Maya had the best of both worlds. She had a kind grandmother to look after her when she was young and a boisterous, proud mother to raise her from age ten. Vivian taught Maya to speak up for herself and never compromise her values. The relationship that Maya had with her mother became the strongest of her life. The two women truly loved each other. The abandonment was part of their story. but so was the strength that Vivian taught Maya to have and the risk-taking that Vivian taught Maya to seek. Had Maya not had this unique upbringing, the world probably would have never known her as a celebrated poet, writer, and activist.



# Chapters 1 - 2

## Summary

Maya Angelou's mother, Vivian Baxter, was born into a poor, black family during the first decade of the twentieth century in St. Louis. Her father was from Trinidad and had a thick Caribbean accent. He had evaded immigration authorities when he smuggled himself into Florida on a banana boat. Her father was very dark, but her mother was so light that she passed for white. Vivian was the first born of six.

Vivian's father warned his children not to steal. But, he advocated fighting (to the point of violence) in the defense of one's principles. As a result, the family became known as the "Bad Baxters." Her brothers would rough up an enemy, and Vivian would join in. Grandmother Baxter played piano in the Baptist church. She taught her kids to sing hymnals and loved to hear them. The kids were talented singers who brought in neighbors to hear them and join in the singing. While Grandmother was nurturing their spirit, Grandfather eagerly awaited their tales of fighting and violence. He gave the task of toughening up her brothers to Vivian. He called her his little "girl-boy."

Vivian who matured to be a beautiful woman met Bailey Johnson, a handsome soldier returning from World War I in 1924. Having been a veteran soldier, Bailey measured up in the toughness department for Vivian's family. However, they were not happy when Vivian married him. He was a cook. They wanted her to marry a professional man – a doctor or a lawyer. To escape her family's anger, the young couple moved to California. After Bailey, Jr. and Maya were born, the couple separated. They just didn't get along. The kids were sent to their paternal grandmother, Annie Henderson, in Stamps, Arkansas.

Maya lived with Annie until she was ten. The time was uneventful except for a horrid incident when she visited St. Louis. She was raped there, and the rapist was killed. Maya lived with the guilt of his death. She felt she was responsible for his death because she named him. After the incident, Maya clammed up and would only talk to her brother Bailey.

The times were very tough for fourteen-year-old Bailey to be living in Arkansas. During that era, black people had to step aside if a white person was passing him down the street. Bailey was vocal about this treatment, complaining openly and loudly. Neighbors warned Annie that Bailey was heading for trouble. Annie tried to counsel him but he defended his stand. She knew it was time for him to leave the south. She contacted Vivian. The kids, especially Bailey, would have to return to her in California. Maya didn't want to leave her grandmother; but, she knew it wasn't safe for Bailey. Black boys who even looked at white girls risked being beaten or killed.



## Analysis

Vivian Baxter's aggressive personality stemmed from her father who despised liars and thieves. He taught his kids to stick up for themselves and advocated violence to do so.

Maya and her brother were sent to live with their grandmother because Vivian wasn't good with little kids.

After Maya and Bailey had lived with their grandmother for ten years, she felt it was better that the teenaged Bailey not live in the small, Southern racist town. She decided to send them back to their mother. Since Maya had only been a year old when her mother sent her away, she didn't remember anything about her mother.

## Vocabulary

octoroon, songfest, escapades, contentious, mutism



## Chapters 3 - 4

### Summary

Maya and Annie traveled on the train to California. Bailey stayed with his Uncle Willie. He would come later. Maya was nervous about meeting her mother. Annie assured Maya that her mother wanted her there and that she shouldn't be afraid. When they met at the train station, Maya thought her mother looked like a movie star. She felt horrible because she wasn't pretty or even cute. But, Vivian embraced Maya and told her she was beautiful. Annie had always been loving and affectionate, but she didn't kiss the children. Vivian was smothering Maya in kisses – something very new for Maya.

Vivian's home was a boardinghouse where Maya would have her own room. Annie stayed until she felt that Maya was adjusting to the change. Maya didn't want her to go, but Annie told her to have trust in God. He would look after her.

Vivian sensed that Maya didn't approve of her loud jazz music and her dancing around in the middle of the floor by herself. Vivian had a talk with Maya and told her that she was different than Annie. She wanted Maya to accept her. Vivian was thrilled when Maya finally smiled at her. Maya realized that a kind word or smile could be a charitable gift. Vivian told her that she didn't want to be called "ma'am." She wanted to be called "Mother." Maya suggested that calling her "Lady" would be more fitting. She was a beautiful lady who didn't look like a mother. Vivian accepted the title, but Annie didn't like it. Maya decided that she and Bailey would decide what to call Vivian after he arrived.

When Bailey stepped off the train, he smiled when he saw Annie and Maya. But when he saw Vivian he ran to her and embraced her. Maya knew that Bailey had strong feelings for Vivian. It seemed he'd forgotten that she abandoned them. Maya and Bailey would smash the toys and presents she sent them when they lived with Annie.

Annie told Maya that she would stay just two days after Bailey's arrival. Maya couldn't bear to think of Annie alone on the train and wanted to go with her. Bailey wanted to know why Maya was silent. She told him that she wanted to return to Stamps with Annie. Bailey was hurt, and it was hard for Maya to keep from crying.

### Analysis

Maya wanted to stay with her grandmother. Vivian was such a contrast to the gentle grandmother that Maya had lived with. Maya could not bring herself to call Vivian "Mother." Vivian sensed Maya's resistance to her and didn't mind being called "Lady." Vivian was smart by not forcing a relationship with Maya. She was letting Maya come to her.



Bailey was more overtly hurt by his mother's abandonment than Maya. He remembered his mother. He adored and resented her at the same time.

## Vocabulary

boardinghouse, anatomy, philanthropist



# Chapters 5 - 6

## Summary

When Maya and Bailey were alone at Vivian's house, Bailey asked her what was wrong. She responded that she didn't like Vivian and didn't understand why she left them. Bailey said the only way to find out was to ask her. A man of action, Bailey whisked Maya along with him and immediately confronted his mother. She explained how she and their father didn't get along. The children had brought a lot of pressure on the couple. Annie offered to take the children. After the children were sent to Arkansas, she and their father got along much better. She missed them, but she would have been a terrible mother.

Vivian soon broke the news to Maya and Bailey that they had a stepfather. She had married Clidell Jackson a few years before. He was out of town but would soon return. When he was about to return, Vivian fussed about the house to get everything just right and asked the children to dress nicely. Clidell was a pleasant-looking man who wanted to be a good influence on the kids' lives. He told them they could call him Daddy Clidell. He loved Vivian very much, and he vowed to always take care of the three of them.

Bailey immediately liked Clidell, but Maya wasn't sure.

## Analysis

Bailey confronted his mother about abandoning him and Maya. She answered honestly by saying that she had missed them but she would have been a terrible mother to young children.

Maya continued to hold back in accepting her mother. This reluctance was made worse when Vivian announced that they had a stepfather.

## Vocabulary

wondrous, paunch





# Chapters 7 - 8

## Summary

Maya was heartbroken when Annie left. She tried to board the train when it was ready to take off, but Vivian stopped her. However, children are resilient. Maya was going to make the most of it. She had her brother with her again and she was beginning to like, maybe love, her mother. Vivian soon had a heart-to-heart talk with Maya and Bailey. She told them that their reputations were more important than the clothes they had or big cars they may drive some day. She and Clidell were honest people who didn't lie but who laughed a lot – at themselves and at each other. Papa Ford, a houseman who lived on the property, cleaned and cooked; but, the kids were responsible for keeping their own rooms clean.

Vivian announced to Bailey, Clidell, and Papa Ford that Maya had decided not to call her mother because she wasn't Maya's idea of a mother. She liked the title "Lady" that Maya wanted to call her. She decided to embrace that title and introduce herself as Lady Jackson. Bailey wanted to be called "Bailey," not Junior. Papa Ford was fine with his name. Clidell liked "Daddy Clidell."

Maya answered the phone one day. It was Vivian telling Maya that she had been released on her own recognizance. She had been arrested for gambling and was out on bail. A few weeks later she was arrested again. A lady friend from church stole a two-pound can of coffee that she offered to share with Vivian. Vivian didn't want any part of it. She told the woman to return the coffee. When the woman refused, Vivian slugged her. Both women were taken to jail.

Bailey enjoyed being with Vivian more than Maya did. But, there were times when the anger of abandonment would surface in the teenager. He'd slam doors and sulk, but he wouldn't go too far because Vivian wouldn't stand for it. On occasion, he reminded her that she had abandoned them.

Vivian admired Maya's honesty. She always told the truth. She didn't lie when Vivian found that her whiskey supply was being depleted. She was taking some in a mason jar to the movie theater. She gave it to the other kids because she wanted them to like her. Vivian was very upset with her. She could go to jail for her liquor being given to underage kids. Bailey confirmed to Maya that she was wrong. Maya realized she was wrong and asked for her mother's forgiveness.

## Analysis

Maya was heartbroken to be separated from her grandmother. But, she began to realize that living with Vivian wouldn't be boring. Vivian began to gently teach the children about values and the importance of a good reputation.



Vivian saw good qualities in Maya. She especially admired her honesty, which was something her own father always insisted on. Bailey was still struggling with the hurt and resentment of being abandoned.

## Vocabulary

skool, recognizance, rationed



## Chapters 9 - 10

### Summary

Vivian arranged for each of the children to spend some time with their biological father who lived in San Diego. Bailey visited first and told Maya that he wouldn't have to go again. Maya visited him for three weeks over the summer. Loretta, her father's young wife, met Maya at the train station. Loretta was small and petite. Maya was twice her size and had an adult voice. Loretta was in shock. Bailey's and Maya's father had lied to Loretta about the ages of his kids.

Loretta was cool toward Maya during her entire visit. Maya's father didn't have much to say to her. While her father and stepmother worked, Maya spent her time at a nearby library, the San Diego Zoo, and at the movie theater. She looked forward to the three-week stay ending.

During Maya's last week, her father decided he would take May on a trip to Mexico. Both Loretta and Maya thought it was a bad idea, but he was insistent. They drove to a cantina thirty miles beyond Tijuana. There he met a woman with two small children who looked like Maya. They ate and drank at the cantina until he was drunk. Maya and the woman had to help him into the backseat of the car. Maya had never driven before, but she had watched others work the clutch and manual transmission. Maya made it all the way back to the border without incident.

Loretta was angry and took it out on Maya. She called her and Vivian vile names. When Maya lunged at her in anger, she cut her with her sewing scissors. Maya's father took Maya to stay at a friend's house where her cuts were bandaged. The next day, while her father and Loretta were at work, Maya came back to the house, packed her things, and went to the bus station where she rented a locker for her belongings. She found a clean-looking car in a junkyard to sleep in. Later, she learned that there were kids of all races who slept there. She became friendly with a white girl named Bea. The boys cut grass and did other odd jobs to make money. The girls collected soda bottles to turn in for deposits. Maya enjoyed her time there. She planned to stay there until her cuts healed so Vivian wouldn't be upset. When her cuts healed over, she called her mother who sent a train ticket to the San Diego station. Maya returned home.

Since Maya was a semester and a half ahead in school, Vivian told her she didn't have to attend school for the semester and could get a job. Maya decided to do just that. She wanted to be a conductor on a streetcar. She went to the company but was not allowed to apply. She told her mother it was because she was black. Vivian urged her to go after the job anyway. She had Maya take the Russian books she was reading and sit in the lobby. She got there before the other officer girls arrived and took a shorter lunch than they did.



After the second day, Maya didn't want to go back but she didn't want to be a failure in Vivian's eyes. She stuck it out for two weeks. Finally, someone noticed her. The man asked her why she wanted to work there and if she had any experience. She like the uniforms and working with people and she'd been a chauffeur for her grandmother – which wasn't true. There was an article in the paper that Maya was the first black person to work on the railway.

Vivian religiously took her to her job, even the 4 am shift. For security, Vivian always had a handgun in the car. Maya worked at the railway until the next semester began. Vivian told Maya that she learned that she had power and determination and could do anything.

## Analysis

Maya learned that a nice stepfather was better than a biological father who didn't really care about her. She saw her father for the first time when she was thirteen. The visit was a disaster. She ran away from his house and never wanted to see him again. She was glad to return to Vivian's house.

Since Maya excelled at school, she was a semester and a half ahead of the other kids. Sensing that Maya needed more than school and home, Vivian suggested she get a job. When it seemed impossible for a black girl to get a job on the railway, Vivian coached her on getting the job she wanted. She taught her to be tenacious and to go after what she wanted.

## Vocabulary

captivated, immobilized, dietitian, cantina, predicament



# Chapters 11 - 12

## Summary

When she was fifteen, Maya was allowed to stay out until eleven if her brother was with her. One evening, Maya found herself out late without her brother. She rode on the streetcars to the Mexican area to have tacos and tamales. She knew she should go home, but she didn't want to miss the fun. It was one o'clock when Maya finally told the others she had to leave. She didn't have enough money for the streetcar so she walked home.

Maya was greeted at home by a furious Vivian who slapped her face. Everyone was worried, even Papa Ford. Later, Bailey told her to pack two night's worth of clothing. He didn't know where they were going; they were just going. Bailey announced to Vivian that they were leaving. He didn't allow anyone to beat up on his baby sister.

Vivian convinced Bailey to let her talk with them. Alone with the children in the kitchen, she got down on her knees and begged God to forgive her. She was so sincere and sorry that Maya and Bailey joined her on the floor in a group hug.

At seventeen, Bailey decided to join the military. It would mean he would drop out of school with only a few months to go. But, he couldn't wait. He regretted that he hadn't returned with Annie. He suspected that Vivian was having an affair with a family friend named Buddy. Maya tried to convince him to change his mind, but he avoided talking about it over the next month. Vivian was shocked and hurt when Bailey showed her his papers. He had joined the Merchant Marines. She was upset because his graduation was only a few weeks away. He mentioned Buddy, but Vivian didn't understand how he was involved.

Vivian and Maya missed Bailey. It was too painful to even talk about. Vivian prepared to leave for a two-month trip to Alaska where she and Daddy Clidell owned some gambling joints.

## Analysis

Vivian struck Maya across the face when she stayed out way past her curfew. She was just worried about her, but Bailey warned her about hitting his little sister. The siblings were close and stayed close all their lives. Vivian got down on her knees and asked their forgiveness. She wanted to have a good relationship with both her children – making up for lost time.

Vivian tried to talk Bailey out of quitting school and joining the military. But, he had issues that he'd never worked out. He had to get away and figure some things out for himself. Maya couldn't even talk about Bailey; it was too emotional.

## Vocabulary

mariachi, enormity, carfare, trek, trepidation, absurdity, akimbo, aromatic, piteously, scornfully



# Chapters 13 - 14

## Summary

Maya didn't develop early. She thought her slow development and her tiny breasts were signs that she would grow up to be a lesbian. The boys didn't seem to mind. They let her know they'd like to have sex with her. She was interested in most of them but had a soft spot for Babe who lived down the block. He was nineteen, and she had a huge crush on him. He made overtures to her, and finally she agreed to have sex with him.

Babe took her to the house of a friend who wasn't home. There was no romancing. It was just sex. Maya hoped that having sex would assure her that she wasn't a lesbian, but it didn't. Two months later, Maya learned that she was pregnant. She told Babe, but he didn't want any part of Maya and her baby. He swore that the baby was not his.

Maya kept her pregnancy from her mother, but told Bailey when he was home on leave. She didn't want Vivian to know because she'd take her out of school. Vivian was out of town as Maya's body changed. Her step-father and Papa Ford noticed a difference in her but couldn't pinpoint what it was. Maya stayed in school and finished her senior year. Maya finally told Daddy Clidell. To her great surprise, he was kind and supportive. He said he would call and tell Vivian who was in Alaska again.

Vivian flew home the next day. She was also understanding. She asked who the father was and if he loved her. Maya responded that the man didn't love her. Vivian said the family would look forward to having a wonderful little baby. Vivian watched over Maya for the next three weeks before the baby came. Vivian was a registered nurse. She took Maya to see a doctor she knew several times during those weeks. Vivian helped her in the delivery room. Maya's first born was a boy.

When the baby was two-months old, Maya got a job and found a place to live. The landlady watched the baby. Vivian wanted her to stay, but she understood that Maya wanted to be on her own. Vivian told her to remember how she'd been raised and that she'd have to learn to make adaptations in life. She warned her to not let anyone change her and that she could always come home. It was the first time that Maya called Vivian "Mother" and not "Lady."

Maya was out on her own, but it wasn't an easy life. By the time she was twenty-two, she had a five-year-old child, her own place, and two jobs. Vivian moved to a large Victorian style house and came and got Guy, Maya's son, twice a week. Maya only visited for dinner once a month. Her mother would often make red rice, which was Maya's favorite dish.

On a walk after dinner one evening, Vivian told Maya that she was certain that Maya was the greatest woman she ever met. She was kind and intelligent like Eleanor Roosevelt. It was the first time that Maya thought she could really become someone.



Right then she decided to stop cursing, drinking, and smoking. It took her some years before she stopped the smoking and drinking, but she eventually did.

## Analysis

Vivian proved her loyalty to Maya when she didn't blink an eye upon learning that the teenaged Maya was pregnant. It was the first time that Maya called her "Mother" and meant it. Maya showed her independent streak when she moved out of her mother's house. She had a tiny baby and a job that barely covered her expenses. But, she wanted to be on her own. Vivian didn't like her leaving, but she understood.

Vivian told Maya that she was the greatest woman she had ever met. It would appear to others that she was exaggerating, but Vivian really meant it. She was sure her daughter could achieve anything she wanted to achieve.

## Vocabulary

substantial, purportedly, infatuation, spontaneously, high-handed, coincided, congratulatory, adaptations, culinary, exploits, Gothic, fervently, emblazoned





# Chapters 15 - 16

## Summary

Mark was tall, handsome, well-built, and black. He was from Texas but found work in Detroit. He wanted to save money so he could hire a trainer to become a boxer. Three of his fingers were cut off in a machine in the automotive plant where he worked. The accident ended his dream to be a boxer. He moved to San Francisco which is where Maya met him. He wasn't bitter over his lost dream. He was a soft-spoken man who even paid for Maya's babysitter on occasion.

But, when Mark thought Maya had another man, he punched her in the face repeatedly. They were on a cliff overlooking Half-Moon Bay. The blows knocked her unconscious. When she came to he was crying and calling her names. He hit her again with a large board, and she was out again.

He put her in the backseat of his car and drove to Betty Lou's Chicken Shack in the black area of town. He showed passersby what happened to lying, cheating women. Betty Lou was Vivian's friend. She called Vivian and told her what was happening to Maya. Maya woke to find herself very sore and in bed at Mark's place. It was hard to breathe because he had broken her ribs. He was crying and telling Maya that he loved her. He threatened to cut his throat with a double-edged razor. In the mean time, Vivian was trying to track him down through her many contacts.

Mark suddenly decided he would nurse Maya back to health. He left to get her some fruit juice. She was praying and in and out of consciousness. In one of her lucid moments, she heard loud voices, one of them belonging to her mother. She had found out where Mark lived through her contacts and a series of events. With the help of three burly men, Vivian broke the door down. When she saw Maya, for the first time in her life she fainted. Maya's face was swollen to twice its normal size and her front teeth had been driven into her lip. Maya never loved her mother more than at that moment. Maya wound up in the hospital and was sure that her prayers had been answered and that her life had been saved.

Maya recovered at her mother's house. Vivian had a "wanted" out on Mark. She gave Maya a handgun for her protection. Trumpet, a bartender friend of Vivian's, worked at the Sutter Street Bar. Trumpet let Vivian know that Mark was there in the bar. Vivian instructed Maya to go to a hotel across the street from the bar and telephone him from the lobby pretending she was another woman who wanted to see him. When he walked out of the bar, Vivian told Maya to shoot and kill him.

Maya called Mark from the hotel. He didn't recognize her voice and agreed to meet her. Maya was holding the handgun on him when he crossed the street. He begged for mercy. She told him to go back to the bar. She couldn't shoot him.



Maya's two jobs barely covered her expenses. She worked in a dinette as a fry cook starting at 5 in the morning and at a Creole diner starting in the afternoon. Guy had health problems, and Maya often took him to an allergist. She read a magazine article there about spending more time with children. The article, written by a white woman, upset her. It was easy for a wealthy woman who didn't know what it was like to be poor to spend more time with their children.

To help Maya, Vivian told her she needed to get a much better job. She offered her one-thousand dollars as an investment that Maya could pay back. Maya was too proud to take the money as a gift. That money would allow her to quit one of her jobs. Maya quit the early job; but, when she checked in for her evening job, she learned that she had lost that job. Maya had a thousand dollars and no job. She would be spending more time with her son. Maya and Guy both enjoyed the extra time together. Maya applied for a job at the Melrose Record Shop and was hired. The job paid a good salary.

Maya worked for a Jew and a Christian Scientist and she was a Baptist. They all got along just fine and truly liked each other. Maya was so knowledgeable of the artists and their music that she got a raise before she expected it. She began paying Vivian some of the money back. Tosh Angelos was handsome and dignified and Maya had a crush on him. He knew a lot about music and purchased a few records from Maya after he asked her what her name was. He came back again but Maya figured he really hadn't noticed her. She learned he was of Greek descent, was in the navy and was a graduate of the University of Oregon.

After being absent for several weeks, Tosh returned in his naval uniform and invited Maya to dinner. They dated for the next three months and often included Guy in their plans. One night he proposed to her. Vivian was upset. Tosh was a white man. Maya thought Vivian wasn't prejudiced. Vivian responded that if Maya was going to marry a white man, she should have picked a rich one. Maya was satisfied with who Tosh was. He vowed to take care of her and Guy. Maya had to admit that she was marrying him because he asked. She didn't say that she loved him. Vivian suddenly decided to move from San Francisco to Los Angeles. Maya was heartbroken. Bailey assured her that he'd always be there for her.

## Analysis

Maya was abused by a boyfriend who almost killed her. Vivian wanted Maya to kill him, literally. But, Maya had more restraint than Vivian and didn't have the violent streak that Vivian had. When Maya was in dire financial straits, Vivian loaned her money that she could pay back. Vivian was sensitive that Maya was proud and wanted to be independent.

Vivian was not happy with Maya's choice of husband. She told Maya that if she had wanted to marry a white man, she should have made it a rich white man. Maya wasn't in love with Tosh, but he promised to take care of her and her son.

## Vocabulary

indelibly, rancor, hearsay, allergist, contagious, prejudice, volatile



# Chapters 17 - 18

## Summary

Tosh found a small three-bedroom house with a living and dining room. Maya loved being a housewife, but she missed her mother. Vivian loved Maya, but she didn't think that she had chosen the best husband. She hoped that she wouldn't be totally miserable. Tosh was jealous of the other men at the record store and asked Maya to quit. She didn't realize that his jealous nature would become a problem. She got hired at Metropolitan Insurance as a file clerk.

Tosh caught on that Vivian didn't like him because he was white. They had fun with other mixed couples. Bailey and his live-in girlfriend Yvonne came over regularly. Maya continued to feel a yearning for a renewed relationship with her mother and for a relationship with God. Tosh was an atheist. She initially thought that she could convert Tosh, but it wasn't possible. Maya made sure that he didn't influence Guy to reject his religion.

Tosh didn't like Maya going to church. She kept a change of clothes at Bailey's house. Twice a month, wearing her exercise clothes she would tell Tosh she was going for a walk. Then, she would change at her brother's house and go to church. Vivian came to San Francisco for a visit, and Maya invited her for dinner. Over dinner and drinks, Vivian apologized to Tosh for not accepting him at first. She thanked him for loving her daughter.

When she was fifteen, Maya received a scholarship from the California Labor School where she studied dance. The lessons were free, and she loved them. Later, when she had matured, she saved her money to continue her dance lessons. While married to Tosh she took one dance lesson a month. On one occasion, Tosh wanted to watch the lesson. He brought Guy with him. The lessons began to irritate Tosh when he wanted to go to dinner and she was signed up for a dance lesson. Tosh accused her of neglecting her duties at home.

Vivian moved back to San Francisco to keep an eye on some of her businesses. She had an open house party which Maya and Guy attended. Tosh said he had another engagement. One day Vivian invited Maya and Tosh to have drinks at the beach. Vivian asked Maya was she was so unhappy in front of Tosh. She replied that many of the things she liked had been taken from her. She had no friends and couldn't stop by the record store. She had to quit her dance lessons and had to sneak to go to church. Vivian found the irony in having to lie to go to church.

## **Analysis**

Vivian and Tosh didn't like each other. Vivian tried to make the best of it, but Tosh was sullen and belligerent. Maya was beginning to feel suffocated. Tosh was jealous of her every move and wanted to control what she did and who she was with.

Tosh was beginning to take everything that Maya liked away from her. Vivian confronted Maya in Tosh's presence. She wanted to know why she wasn't happy; it brought everything out in the open.

## **Vocabulary**

commodious, atheist, beatitudes, insinuation, sardonic



# Chapters 19 - 20

## Summary

Vivian invited the family to a Russian restaurant, but Tosh said he couldn't make it. Later, Maya asked Tosh why he couldn't come with them. He thought they were seeing too much of her mother. More and more Maya was realizing that her marriage was over and that she wanted an apartment for her and Guy. When she explained her reason for leaving, she sensed that he was just as relieved as she was. Guy was hurt and stayed angry for a year. Bailey couldn't understand why Maya was leaving the security of a marriage.

Maya met Nina who was a strip-tease dancer when Maya resumed her dance classes. Nina suggested that Maya try out for a stripping job. She made \$300 a week. Maya observed the dancers who didn't strip all the way but close to it. She figured she could do it. Besides, she wasn't in a position to turn down any job. Vivian was all for it and volunteered to make Maya a costume and help her with music and choreography.

Maya hired Roy, a conga drummer from dance class, and put on her skimpy costume for her tryout at the Bonne Nuit Dance Club. She gave a sensuous and sultry performance but did not strip. She got the job. Her performance was critiqued in several newspaper columns. She was honest with the customers about the drinks they were buying, and she could actually dance. Maya brought in customers and developed a following.

Maya was invited to dine with customers and the club owners. The owners even made arrangements for seven-year-old Guy to dine with them. At one dinner, Maya sang a few calypso songs. The owners were impressed. They paid for a singing coach for her and planned for her singing debut. After being a dancer for four months, she opened as a singing star at the Purple Onion. Her weekly salary rose to \$750.

Tosh's last name had originally been Angelopoulos. Maya shortened it to Angelou and debuted as Maya Angelou with her mother, brother, son, and friends in the audience. She was introduced as a calypso singer from Cuba. She was barefoot and wore an exotic floor-length dress that her mother designed and had made for her. Vivian had never been more proud of her daughter.

## Analysis

Maya left Tosh. He understood and was relieved himself. Bailey, Jr. worried about his sister being out on her own again. Vivian was happy; she knew Maya would make it on her own.

No longer suffocated by an obsessive husband, Maya was able to soar. She became the risk-taker that her mother had always been. She took up dancing again and



discovered that she could have a career singing and entertaining people. She was truly becoming Vivian's daughter.

## Vocabulary

borscht, stroganoff, waned, equanimity, distraught, tantalizing, dilemma, choreograph, sultrily, coerce, calypso, exotic



# Chapters 21 - 22

## Summary

The producer of the stage play “Porgy and Bess” contacted Maya and offered her the role of Ruby. She wanted to take the offer, but the play would be touring through Europe. She didn’t want to leave Guy. Vivian wouldn’t hear of her turning the chance down. She and her friends would take care of Guy.

Several big names, such as Leontyne Price, William Warfield and Cab Calloway, were members of the cast. Maya learned a great deal about music from her fellow cast members during the six-month tour. She also became fluent in French and Spanish. She sang in clubs after the shows and taught dance in her off hours. Despite her busy schedule, she kept in constant contact with Guy by phone. After the tour ended, Maya became fearful of flying back. What would happen to Guy if her plane crashed?! As a result, she took a ship to New York and a train to San Francisco. When she embraced her son upon her return, she swore she’d never leave him again.

Maya began to have deep concerns about raising a black boy in a racist society. She had visions of jumping out of the window with him and sought psychiatric help. The psychiatrist she saw turned out to be a privileged young white man. She figured he could never relate to what she was going through. So, she left. She sought counsel from Frederick Wilkerson, her voice teacher who was also her mentor. When she told him that she thought she was going crazy and was a danger to herself and her son, he gave her a drink and told her to write down her blessings on a pad of paper. For starters, he reminded her that she could “write,” “read,” “hear,” and “see.” When she finished her list, she began to feel silly. From that point on, she was always grateful for her blessings, regardless of any circumstances she faced.

## Analysis

Maya was offered a role in a major play. She toured Europe. The guilt she felt for leaving Guy who stayed with Vivian was tied back to her own feelings of abandonment.

Maya was so concerned about her son that she had fantasies about killing him and herself. She sought therapy, but a friend had a better solution. He told her to write down all her blessings. When she did, she realized how fortunate she was and always remembered her blessings when times were tough.

## Vocabulary

self-flagellation, psyche, mentor, pessimism





# Chapters 23 - 24

## Summary

When Guy was sixteen, Maya began singing in the Cosmos Alley nightclub in Los Angeles where she met the famous poet named Langston Hughes and novelist John Killen. She told them she wanted to be a poet. Killen suggested that she come to New York to find out if she really was a writer. Since Guy was a teenager, they could move to New York and she could give it a try. Vivian had new plans, too. She was going to become a sea woman because the seaman's union wouldn't let women join and she was sure they wouldn't want a black woman. She was going to push the envelope.

Maya wanted to see her mother before she left for New York, so they met in Fresno at a newly integrated hotel. Vivian wouldn't let Maya carry her bags. She insisted that a bellman carry them. Even though the hotel was integrated, it was still unusual to see two black women registering for a room. Vivian had a handgun with her in case there was any resistance to their stay.

Maya and Guy moved to a two-bedroom house in Brooklyn. Maya sang in a Manhattan nightclub and Guy got an after-school job at a bakery. Maya began writing songs and joined the Harlem Writers Guild where she felt a great sense of support. A year after their arrival, they moved to Manhattan. Vivian visited and was pleased with the lives of her daughter and grandson.

Maya had appeared on Bill Moyers' television program. He invited Maya, Vivian, Guy, and a friend named Rosa to his house for a party. A limo picked Maya, Vivian, and Guy up and drove to Harlem to pick up Rosa. The neighborhood was dangerous with drug dealers and criminals. Vivian made Maya and Guy stay in the limo while she and the chauffeur went into the apartment building to get Rosa.

"Porgy and Bess" was being made into a movie starring Diahann Carroll and Sidney Poitier with Otto Preminger directing. Maya was in the film and had a dance scene with Sammy Davis, Jr. She was six-feet tall and Sammy was five-three or four. Preminger directed choreographer Hermes Pan to create an appropriate dance for them. During the film shoot, Maya became friends with Nichelle Nichols who later appeared in Star Trek. Their boyfriends were friends so they all decided to visit San Francisco together. They stopped by Vivian's house in Fulton. They all had a great time together.

Later that evening when Maya and Vivian were alone, Vivian told Maya to call a number and ask for Mr. Cliff Thomas. She was to say that it was long distance calling. When Maya called she got an angry woman on the phone who hung up on her. The woman was Cliff's wife. They'd been separated and he'd been with Vivian for two years. But, it appeared that he was seeing his wife again.



Maya woke the next morning to see her mother holding a paper bag (with a pistol inside) on a big man who was crying and on his knees. She told him to get out. After Maya had drifted off, Vivian drove over to Cliff's house, pulled a gun on his wife, and forced Cliff to come with her. Maya was upset because she had friends in the house. But, Vivian said a woman has to protect herself. Maya wished she had picked another time, but that was Vivian Baxter.

## Analysis

Maya was drawn to writing, particularly poetry. Having learned to take risks from Vivian, she and Guy moved to New York and into the literary world. It was the start of a successful writing career that spanned her lifetime.

On a visit to New York, Maya was reminded of her mother's penchant for violence. While she had other guests in her house, Vivian threatened to shoot an unfaithful lover that she brought to Maya's house. She learned to be prepared for anything from her volatile mother.

## Vocabulary

integrated, finery, ominous

# Chapters 25 - 26

## Summary

Vivian made friends with members of various women's groups. She organized her friends to collect used clothing, have them cleaned and repaired and set them up in her garage for the poor. She also collected money for \$350 scholarships for students who finished the eleventh grade and for gift cards at department stores. The mayor of Stockton called and asked Vivian if she could help a couple and their teenage children. They were unemployed, couldn't find work and were living in their car. She told the mayor to have them come to her house the next day. She fed them, gave them clean clothes and helped the man a job at a garage and the woman at a grocery store. Finally, she found accommodations for them that night.

The mayor came to visit to thank Vivian for her help. The mayor who was a white woman was surprised that Vivian was black. The family she had helped was also white.

Vivian called and asked Maya to come to San Francisco for a week. She was ill but was seeing a doctor and was sure she'd be fine. Maya arrived to find her mother looking a little weak. Bailey was coming the next day. She wanted to get her property straightened out. She was working as a nurse for a white woman who was suffering from some form of dementia. The next day Maya became dizzy and odd feeling when she was introduced to Mrs. Stein, the white woman, who was sitting in front of a large, colorful Matisse. She even cried. The woman understood that it was the artwork that had been too much for her.

Maya had had a physical reaction to the artwork. It was almost as if she could hear the art – like a symphony. Mrs. Stein explained that artists are often overwhelmed when they see the work of other artists. Mrs. Stein had been married to Leo Stein, brother of Gertrude Stein the writer. Mrs. Stein had forgotten most of her life but she loved her artwork. It was her reality.

## Analysis

As successful as Vivian was as a businesswoman and property owner, she still had to deal with bias. She headed a charity that helped the poor in Stockton, CA. However, when the mayor dropped by to thank her, Vivian could tell the mayor was shocked to see that she was black.

Vivian, who was independent and proud, asked Maya to come visit her. She was ill. It was the first sign that the vibrant Vivian's health was on the decline.

## Vocabulary

hilarity, tonal, symphonic



# Chapters 27 - 28

## Summary

Maya was in Stockholm while a screenplay she had written was being shot. She was also writing the music for the movie. It was about an African American nightclub singer who was a big star in Europe. The experience compelled Maya to think about directing a film. Maya had agreed to braid the star's hair each morning because the Swedish beauticians didn't know how to make cornrows. In the fourth week, the star asked the director to ban Maya from the set. She made her nervous. Maya was told that she could only come on the set in the morning to braid the star's hair.

One of the actors became unhappy with his compensation and decided to leave before his work on the film was done. Maya got on her knees and asked him to stay. It would be the first time a black woman's screenplay had ever been made into a film. But the young actor wasn't worried about Maya and was adamant about leaving. But, then she became "Vivian Baxter" and threatened him if he left. He saw the light and decided to stay.

Maya asked Vivian to fly to Stockholm. She needed some mothering. Vivian was on the next flight out. She told Maya that the others were mistreating her. Maya just needed to do her work and they would all come back to her. In the meantime, Vivian would take care of her and stayed on for the remainder of the shoot. Every morning, Maya would come to the set to braid the star's hair. The cast and crew would stand around and do nothing until Maya left. Having her mother to dote on her helped her see it through. They were staying in a sublet apartment. Vivian had Maya invite the nice members of the cast and crew for dinner. She charmed everyone and Maya noticed that they started treating her differently on the set. Eventually, the director told her she could stay on set. Maya figured out that because Vivian treated her like she was special, the others saw her as a person of value. It was a mother's responsibility.

Vivian had been at sea as she planned. She had shipped out to Hawaii, Tahiti, Bora-Bora, and New Zealand. Maya and Vivian decided to tour Europe while they were there. They made plans to visit Paris and London and sail back to New York. They had such a great time in Paris that they extended their stay.

Maya recognized that her mother gave her the gift of courage. She took many risks both personally and professionally. She traveled to Africa where Guy would finish high school in Cairo. She lived with a South African freedom fighter when he was at the United Nations. When that relationship failed, Maya took her son to Ghana where he enrolled in college. When another relationship ended, she moved from Ghana to North Carolina. She realized that she was a teacher who could write. For the rest of her life, she taught at Wake Forest. All the while, her mother always supported whatever she decided to do and would always come to her when she needed her.



When Vivian was seventy-four, she lived in Stockton, California, with her fourth husband. She said he was the love of her life. But, at one point she wanted to throw him out on the street. She called Maya who was in North Carolina for help. She wanted Maya to talk to her husband. She wanted to have sex; but, since he had recently had a stroke, he was afraid that having sex would bring on another stroke. Maya thought all day about what she'd say to him. Finally, she called him and told him that he was starving Vivian in the love department. Vivian called the next day happy and laughing.

Bailey had been impacted by Vivian's abandonment of them all his life. Maya was too young to remember her. He began using heroin when he was eighteen. When he left the Merchant Marines, he wound up in a drug-filled area. Maya found him in a shoot-up house in East Oakland. She had come there to get him. He wouldn't leave; he told her to go home to her son.

Vivian was aware that his anger and bitterness stemmed from her abandonment of him. What saved Bailey was a girl he met who had a strong personality like Vivian. They moved to Hawaii and he got clean. But, she died unexpectedly and he fell into the drug abyss again.

## Analysis

Maya had written a screenplay and had flown to Stockholm to be part of the shoot. But, she wasn't accepted – even by the black actors – and felt left out. Vivian came and charmed the people whose attitude suddenly changed toward Maya.

Maya recognized that her mother had given her the gift of courage. That gift allowed Maya to develop and grow into the great potential she had. Bailey's life hit a nadir when he was into heroin and had become a junkie. Vivian recognized that he had been confused all his life and knew it was her fault. To the relief of Maya and Vivian, Bailey met a nice girl and finally straightened out.

## Vocabulary

luxuriant, plait, appendage, raconteur, off-putting, mollycoddles, disembarked, apartheid, subsided, clamor, petulantly, derision, pondered, procreation, desolation



# Chapters 29 - 30

## Summary

Maya flew to see her mother when she got word that she was in the hospital. She had lung cancer and emphysema. She had three months to live. Maya took Vivian home with her to North Carolina where she could tend to her. Maya redecorated a room for Vivian. When she arrived escorted by Bailey's daughter, Rosa, she didn't have enough energy to walk inside. The taxi driver carried her in. Vivian was checked into a hospital the next day where local doctors could assess her condition. After their exam, they put her on radiation therapy.

Vivian began to get better. The doctors couldn't say why. Her hair began to grow back on her bald head and she began to eat and gain weight. She even socialized and went to church with Maya. Maya decided Vivian was well enough for Maya to resume her lecturing which took her all across the nation. Vivian's best friend, Aunt Area, came to stay with her. She was good for Vivian because they laughed and giggled over everything. But, Vivian told Maya she was going to miss her and to hurry home.

Maya was invited to teach as a visiting professor for three weeks at the prestigious University of Exeter in England. At first, she turned it down. She didn't want to leave her mother. But, Vivian insisted she go. She'd be fine and be there when she got back. But, when Maya was in England, she got word that Vivian was getting worse. She decided to go home. Vivian was in the hospital in a coma. Maya was at her side. When she had to leave, she had three hired women who took turns holding Vivian's hand. Maya wanted her to have constant human contact. One day Maya told Vivian that she knew some people needed permission to leave. She told Vivian that she had accomplished everything she came to earth to do. She was a great mother of grown children. The next day she passed away. Maya knew that her mother deserved a daughter who loved her and that's exactly what she had.

## Analysis

Vivian fell ill and the doctors gave her only a few months to live. Maya had to face life without the mother she had grown to love and depend on. Maya arranged a vigil so that Vivian was never alone during her last days.

Although Vivian was in a coma, Maya felt compelled to tell her that it was all right for her to go that she had a daughter who truly loved her.

## Vocabulary

prognosis, emphysema, confer, hallowed



# Important People

## Maya Angelou

Maya Angelou was born in St. Louis, Missouri. Her parents were Vivian and Bailey Johnson. Her mother was of Trinidadian ancestry. When Maya was just one-year old, her parents weren't getting along. Vivian blamed the attention she had to pay to her two children. She decided it would be better if Maya and her five-year-old brother were sent to live with their paternal grandmother in Stamps, Arkansas.

Annie Henderson was a kindhearted woman who took good care of her two grandchildren. She was the only mother Maya knew. She had no memory of her mother whatsoever. Ten-year-old Maya was crushed when the decision was made that she and her brother should be reunited with their mother who lived in California. She was surprised when she met her mother for the first time in her memory. Her mother was beautiful and young, high-spirited and full of joy. It was a difficult transition for Maya who continued to miss her grandmother and refused to call this woman "Mother."

As the years passed, Vivian Baxter finally proved herself to be a good mother and loyal friend to both her children. She admitted that she just wasn't good at raising little kids. Maya was unsure of herself feeling she was unattractive with little to offer. It was Vivian's relentless support of Maya that convinced her of her self-worth.

Maya went on to become a successful dancer and singer, screenwriter, author, poet, social activist and lecturer. The memoir about Maya and her mother implicitly asserts that she wouldn't have achieved the great heights she was able to attain without the positive attitude and support of her mother. Maya was eventually able to call Vivian "Mother" without reservation.

## Vivian Baxter

Vivian Baxter was Maya Angelou's mother. Her parents had emigrated from Trinidad. Vivian was the first of six children. Her father taught the kids to be honest and straightforward, but he also taught them not to take any guff from anyone. They were known as the "Bad Baxters" in the neighborhood. With Vivian being the oldest, her father expected her to teach her younger brothers to be tough and good fighters. That violent streak that was fostered in Vivian during her childhood stayed with her throughout her life. She was a very bright woman but wanted her way. She was aggressive, assertive, and proud. At times, she was even violent. There were many occasions in her life that she had a loaded gun close at hand.

Vivian married Bailey Johnson, a returning World War I veteran in 1924. Her parents had high hopes for her. They wanted her to marry a professional man like a doctor or lawyer. Bailey was a fry cook and lacked the education to go much further. The marriage lasted only five years during which time they had a son, Bailey, Jr., followed by





a daughter five years later—Maya. Vivian had married young and felt she was missing out on life. She couldn't deal with the kids so she sent them to live with their paternal grandmother, Annie Henderson, in Arkansas.

Ten years later, Annie feared for fifteen-year-old Bailey being a black boy in a racist Southern town. She decided it was time that the children reunited with their mother who had long-since divorced Bailey, Sr. Bailey, Jr. remembered his mother; but, he had conflicting emotions. He was hurt by her abandonment, yet excited to see the exciting young woman who was always laughing and unpredictable. Maya missed her grandmother. To her, Vivian was a stranger.

Vivian admitted that she wasn't a good mother to young children. But, she did prove herself to be a great friend and mother to her teenagers and eventually adult children. She remained closed to Bailey, Jr. and had an extraordinarily close relationship with Maya that survived all the ups and downs of their lives. Maya Angelou would not have been the woman the world knew without the spark and drama that Vivian injected into her spirit.

## **Maya's Grandparents**

Maya's paternal grandparents were from Trinidad. He was dark chocolate while she was an octoroon, only one-eighth black. She could pass for white. Her grandfather evaded immigration by stowing away on a banana boat that was heading for Florida.

## **Bailey Johnson**

Bailey Johnson was Maya Angelou's biological father. When Maya was just one-year old, her parents were having a difficult time taking care of Maya and Bailey, Jr. and sent them to live with their grandmother in Arkansas. Her parents split up and divorced. Maya saw her father again when she was thirteen and had very little contact with him the rest of her life.

## **Bailey Johnson, Jr.**

Bailey Johnson, Jr., was Maya's older brother. The two siblings were very close. Bailey was always protective of Maya and was one of the few constants in her early life. Bailey had anger problems over being abandoned by his mother. He struggled with substance abuse in his early adult life but finally recovered.

## **Annie Henderson**

Annie Henderson was Maya's paternal grandmother who lived in Stamps, Arkansas. She was a soft-spoken, gentle woman who was a great influence on Maya's early life.



Maya was heartbroken when she had to leave Annie to go live with her mother in California.

## **Babe**

When Maya was a teenager she had a crush on a cute neighborhood guy whom everyone called Babe. She lost her virginity to him and wound up pregnant. He denied he was the father and wanted nothing to do with Maya or her baby.

## **Guy**

Guy was Maya's only child. She had him when she was a teenager. She stayed closed to him all her life and never abandoned him. He was the focus of much of her life.

## **Tosh Angelos**

When Maya worked at the Melrose Record Shop in San Francisco she began dating Tosh Angelos, who was a frequent customer. She married him a short time after they started dating. He wasn't accepted by Vivian because he was white. Their marriage lasted only a few years because he was obsessive and didn't want Maya to do anything but stay home and be a housewife. Tosh was Greek. His full surname was Angelopoulos. When Maya began her dancing and singing career, she shortened the name to Angelou. She liked the name and kept it the rest of her life.

## **Mark**

Maya dated a man named Mark for a brief time in San Francisco. He became extremely jealous and violent when he thought Maya was seeing another man. He beat her so savagely that she nearly died. Her mother was able to find where Mark was hiding with Maya. Vivian encouraged Maya to shoot him with a handgun she gave her.



## Objects/Places

### St. Louis, Missouri

Maya Angelou's mother, Vivian Baxter, was born into a poor family in the first decade of the twentieth century in St. Louis, Missouri.

### Trinidad

Vivian Baxter's parents, Maya Angelou's grandparents, were born in Trinidad. Vivian's father had evaded immigration authorities by smuggling himself into Florida on a banana boat.

### Stamps, Arkansas

When Maya was just one-year old and her brother Bailey, Jr., was just five-years old, Vivian couldn't deal with taking care of them and sent them to live with their paternal grandmother, Annie Henderson, in Stamps, Arkansas.

### San Francisco

When Maya was ten, her grandmother took her and her brother to San Francisco, California, to live with Vivian, their mother. It was the first time Maya met her mother.

### North Carolina

Maya finally settled in North Carolina in her later years. From there she lectured all over the country and taught at Wake Forest. She brought her mother to North Carolina when she was very ill and near the end of her life.

### Octoroon

Octoroon

An octoroon is a person who is one-eighth black. Vivian Baxter's mother (Maya Angelou's grandmother) was an octoroon.

### Melrose Record Shop

Maya loved music and was grateful to get a job as a sales clerk in the Melrose Record Shop in San Francisco. She met her husband there; he was a frequent customer.



## Dance Classes

Maya loved music and dancing and was a natural at it. She had free lessons when she was young. As an adult, she saved enough money to take one class a month. Her husband was jealous of anything that took her out of the house and she was forced to quit her lessons.

## Calypso Music

When the owners of a strip club where Maya danced (without stripping) realized she had a good singing voice, they hired a voice coach for her. Soon afterward, she launched her career as an exotic calypso singer from Cuba.

## Handguns

It seemed that when times were tough, Vivian always had a handgun handy. When Mark beat Maya and almost killed her, Vivian gave Maya a handgun and told her to go shoot and kill him. Fortunately, Maya didn't obey her mother.



# Themes

## Abandonment

When Maya was just one-year old, she and her five-year-old brother were sent away by their parents to live with their paternal grandmother, Annie Henderson. As Maya matured, she had no memory of her mother. Initially she curious about her mother but was happy to being cared for by her kind-hearted grandmother. Her brother, Bailey, Jr., was five when he was sent away. He did remember his mother and suffered the hurt of abandonment. He felt he'd been cheated out of a normal life with his mother and father.

Bailey's anger and resentment over his unfortunate circumstance eventually transferred over to Maya although she never felt the same depth of hurt that Bailey suffered. But Bailey was able to enlighten Maya as to how their life wasn't normal without their parents. When her mother sent Christmas or birthday gifts, they would often tear them up and throw them away.

As a result, when Maya and Bailey were sent back to their mother when Maya was ten, she had preconceived notions about her mother and didn't want any part of her. Although there had never been an overt bitterness over her mother abandoning her, the hurt was there even though it was buried deeply within. By actually meeting her face to face, it was suddenly apparent that this young, beautiful woman could have been caring for her and loving her all those years. She loved her grandmother, but this woman was full of life and joy – joy that Maya had been cheated out of for all those years.

Although it took many years for Maya and Bailey to trust their mother, they eventually forged a close relationship with her. Still, those memories of not being wanted by their mother stayed with them forever.

## Racism

Maya Angelou was born into a poor black family in St. Louis in the late 1920s. When she was just one-year old, her parents sent her and her five-year-old brother to live in Stamps, Arkansas, with their grandmother. The children lived there ten years. When Bailey was fifteen, their grandmother became concerned for his safety because Stamps was a small, racist community. She was worried that Bailey would be harmed if he continued living with her. She decided it would be better if the kids lived in the more progressive city of San Francisco with their mother.

Maya suffered from a lack of self-esteem. She felt she wasn't attractive. Even though she excelled at school, she could not envision a successful life or career for herself. When she was a teenager, she wanted to work for the railway. Her mother encouraged her although she knew it was a challenge because no black female had ever been an employee of the railway before.



Vivian battled racism all her life as well. She was a successful and professional business woman and property owner. Vivian set up a charitable organization to help the poor of Stockton, California. The mayor, who was a white woman, dropped by to thank Vivian for her hard work. Vivian knew by the shocked look on the mayor's face that she had no idea that Vivian was black and that she had been helping both the black and white poor people of the city. The mayor stayed just a brief time and made a quick, awkward exit.

Maya and Vivian decided to meet to spend some time together before Maya left on a tour. They decided to stay in Fresno at a newly integrated hotel. Vivian wouldn't let Maya carry her bags. It was time for a bellman to carry their bags. Even though the hotel was integrated, the clerks were uncomfortable when Vivian and Maya came into register. It was still unusual to see two black women registering for a room in a hotel that was formerly just for whites.

Maya had great concerns about raising a black boy in a racist society. She began to have visions of jumping out of the window with her son and killing both of them. She sought counseling from a psychiatrist but turned around and left when she saw that her therapist was a privileged young white man who would never understand what she and her son were going through.

Despite the achievements of both Maya and Vivian throughout their lives, they consistently encountered different forms of racism. It didn't stop them from succeeding; but, it was another barrier with which others did not have to contend.

## Self-Esteem

A strong theme that runs through this memoir about the relationship between Maya and her mother, Vivian, is that of self-esteem. Vivian had self-esteem to spare while Maya had to struggle to accept herself and recognize that she had value and potential – in fact, great potential. Their early childhood upbringing was integral in how both women viewed themselves.

Vivian was the first born of six. Her father was highly-principled and didn't condone lying or stealing. But he had a streak of violence and felt justified in using that violence to defend himself and his family. He taught Vivian to fight for herself and as the first-born she became a natural leader. She had a pleasant personality and was charming and beautiful but she was often "packing." When she felt threatened in any way she resorted to that violence she learned early in life.

Maya was raised by her sweet-tempered grandmother in a small town in the south where blacks were mistreated and held back more than in northern or western towns. As a result, Maya learned early to stay in her place and not expect too much out of life. So it was like water and oil when she was reunited with her high-spirited mother who didn't know the meaning of the phrase, "I can't."



Living with Vivian opened Maya's eyes up to the possibilities in life. She began to dream of a future that she would have never imagined had she stayed with her grandmother. Vivian said it all when one day she stopped Maya and said, "Baby, I've been thinking and now I am sure. You are the greatest woman I've ever met." It was perhaps an odd thing to say to a young woman who at that point had not achieved much in life. But Vivian meant every word of it. It was the very first time that Maya thought that someday she might be somebody. It was a pivotal moment in Maya's life.



# Styles

## Structure

“Mom & Me and Mom” is separated into thirty chapters of varying lengths that are contained in two main sections: “Mom & Me” and “Me and Mom”. In her dedication, Maya pays tribute to both her mother and her son – the two most important people in her life. In a prologue, the author describes how she is often asked – “How’d you get this way?” The memoir explains, at least in part, that in addition to her natural talents, Maya was blessed with a mother who thought with every fiber of her being that her daughter could do anything.

Throughout the book, there are a number of family photos of Maya, Vivian, Maya’s brother, Bailey, Jr., and her son, Guy. She loved these three people more than anyone else in her life. Following the last chapter is a proclamation by the Mayor of Stockton, California, naming a park site after Vivian. She had been honored by her charity work for the poor.

In an “Acknowledgements” section, Maya writes to “all parents who have dared to raise daughters and sons with love, laughter, and prayers.” She also writes that she has kept a mother’s watchful eye on some of her friends including Oprah.

## Perspective

## Tone





## Quotes

The first decade of the twentieth century was not a great time to be born black and poor and female in St. Louis, Missouri.

-- Maya (Chapter 1)

**Importance:** Maya Angelou sets the stage for what life held in store for her mother when she was born poor, black, and female.

He saw his mother, his home, and then all his lonely birthdays were gone. His nights when scary things made noise under the bed were forgotten. He went to her as if hypnotized.

-- Maya (Chapter 2)

**Importance:** Maya recalls when her older brother reunited with their mother. He'd forgotten all the bad times and that she had abandoned them. It worried Maya.

My heart beat so loudly, I thought I would burst. I had been with her so long I couldn't imagine the sun rising without my grandmother putting Vaseline on my arms and brushing my hair.

-- Maya (Chapter 7)

**Importance:** At ten, Maya was heartbroken when she was forced to live with her mother. The only mother she had known up to this point in her life was her grandmother.

No, you learned that you have power – power and determination. I love you and I am proud of you. With those two things, you can go anywhere and everywhere.

-- Vivian (Chapter 10)

**Importance:** Vivian encouraged Maya to fight for the job she wanted. After she got the job and was a success, Vivian told her she could accomplish anything. Those words probably went a long way for the young girl who was never sure of herself.

Independence is a heady draft, and if you drink it in your youth, it can have the same effect on the brain as young wine does. It does not matter that its taste is not always appealing. It is addictive and with each drink you want more.

-- Maya (Chapter 14)

**Importance:** Poet Maya Angelou uses metaphor to describe a time in her youth and the reality of being a single mother out on her own.

Baby, I've been thinking and now I am sure. You are the greatest woman I've ever met.

-- Vivian (Chapter 14)

**Importance:** When Vivian spoke these words to her daughter Maya, it was the very first



time that Maya thought that someday she might be somebody. It was a pivotal moment in Maya's life.

Baby, please forgive me. I don't care if you marry a donkey; I will never walk off and leave you along again.

-- Vivan (Chapter 18)

**Importance:** Vivian came for a visit at Maya's house after she married Tosh. Vivian had been against the marriage because Maya married a white man. Maya hated being estranged from Vivian and, obviously, Vivian felt the same way about being estranged from her daughter Maya.

The light in my marriage waned as the sun sets in the western sky. At first the dimness is hardly noticeable, then noticeable but not alarming. Then with a rush, the light is vanquished by darkness.

-- Maya (Chapter 19)

**Importance:** Maya uses a metaphor to describe the end of her marriage.

Although it is painful, imagine if you had allowed Tosh to take the sense of your person away. Guy would have lost the person he needs the most, his mother. For the sake of yourself, you must preserve yourself and for the sake of Guy, you must preserve his mother.

-- Vivian (Chapter 19)

**Importance:** Vivian was comforting Maya after she decided to divorce Tosh. She recognized that Guy was hurting. She explained why the separation was necessary and beneficial. Vivian was the source of Maya's profound wisdom.

I boarded the plane to New York with my luggage filled with my best clothes and enough guilt to last me a year.

-- Maya (Chapter 21)

**Importance:** Maya accepted an offer to be in "Porgy and Bess." She had to leave Guy behind with her mother; but, she couldn't leave her guilt behind.

Sometimes people put people on pedestals so they can see them more clearly and knock them off more easily.

-- Maya (Chapter 27)

**Importance:** Maya didn't like it when a young fan kneeled to her, praising her talents and abilities. She had a realistic view of herself and didn't see herself as an icon.

My mother's gifts of courage to me were both large and small. The latter are woven so subtly into the fabric of my psyche that I can hardly distinguish where she stops and I begin.

-- Maya (Chapter 28)

**Importance:** This passage illustrates the strong bond between mother and daughter and explains the title of the book.



# Topics for Discussion

## Topic for Discussion 1

How did Vivian Baxter's father's penchant for violence translate to Vivian's adult life? In what ways did it have a positive impact on Maya? In what way was it a negative influence?

## Topic for Discussion 2

Even though Maya and her brother were hurt by the abandonment of their mother, how was living with their grandmother, Annie Henderson, beneficial? Describe the reason that Annie felt she had to send them back to live with their mother when Maya was ten.

## Topic for Discussion 3

What indications were there that Maya did not accept Vivian as her mother? Why did Maya resist accepting Vivian after she reunited with her mother? How was Vivian different from Annie Henderson?

## Topic for Discussion 4

Describe Maya's visit to see her father in San Diego? What lie did Bailey tell that ruined the chance for a good relationship with his children and their stepmother? How did Maya's stepmother abuse her and how did that abuse place Maya in great peril?

## Topic for Discussion 5

Why did Maya take a semester off from school even though she liked school and was a good student? What were the barriers that Maya faced in getting the job she wanted? Discuss how her mother's presence in her life and her I-can-do attitude helped to bring Maya out of her shell.

## Topic for Discussion 6

What were the early elements in her life that made Maya the woman she became? Being abandoned as a child by his or her mother is one of the most tragic things that can happen to a person. How did that abandonment serve to develop the celebrated Maya Angelou who was to become famous and admired around the globe?



## **Topic for Discussion 7**

How did Vivian's reaction to Maya's pregnancy surprise her? How did that reaction impact their relationship? Explain why it was important for Maya to be independent even though it was a struggle for the teenage mother to support herself and her baby.

## **Topic for Discussion 8**

What about Mark's manner and personality fooled Maya? What about Maya's background and personality made her vulnerable to domestic abuse? Explain how Vivian's forceful personality, tenacity, and connections helped her save Maya's life.

## **Topic for Discussion 9**

What caused the marriage of Maya and Tosh to fail? How did Tosh abuse Maya? Describe how liberation from a bad marriage opened Maya up to opportunities she never imagined. What did Maya achieve that would not have been possible if she had stayed married?

## **Topic for Discussion 10**

How did racism impact the lives of both mother and daughter in "Mom & Me & Mom?" What about these two women made them achieve great successes in a time when black people – especially black women – were repressed, ignored, and often mistreated?