I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings Study Guide Questions

Note: The narrator is referred to as "Marguerite" in the questions that deal with her memoirs, since that is how she refers to herself throughout the book. In instances where the author is sharing her beliefs and philosophy, she is referred to as Maya Angelou.

Chapters 1-6

1. In what style is the book written?
2. What happened to Marguerite at Church?
3. What was Marguerite's dream of what she would one day look like?
4. With whom did Marguerite and Bailey live at the beginning of the book? Why?
5. How does the author say she felt in later years about the stereotyped picture of gay song-singing cotton-pickers, and why?
6. What happened that caused Uncle Willie to "lay low" one night?
7. Describe Marguerite's relationship with Bailey.
8. Describe the living conditions for the whites and Blacks in Stamps.
9. Describe the experience Momma had with the "powhitettrash" children when Marguerite was ten years old.
10. Describe the second incident with Sister Monroe, and its effect on Marguerite and Bailey.

Chapters 7-12

1. Describe the incident in which Momma was referred to as "Mrs." and its effect on the Black community.
2. What, according to the author, was the one thing about the whites that was most enviable?
3. What was Marguerite's concept of God?
4. What reaction did the Christmas gifts from her parents cause in Marguerite?
5. What happened to Marguerite and Bailey when she was seven?
6. Describe the Baxter family.
7. How did Marguerite get the name "Maya?"
8. How did Mr. Freeman treat Marguerite?
Chapters 13-17

1. What happened to Mr. Freeman?
2. What happened to Marguerite as a result of the rape and Mr. Freeman's murder?
3. What happened to Bailey and Marguerite after the doctor said she was healed?
4. Describe Mrs. Bertha Flowers' influence on Marguerite.
5. Why did Momma beat Marguerite and Bailey?
6. How did Marguerite feel about Mrs. Cullinan's shortening her name to Mary?
7. How did Marguerite get out of working for Mrs. Cullinan?
8. Why had Bailey stayed out so late when he went to the movies?

Chapters 18-21

1. What is the author's theory about peoples' belief in divine intervention?
2. What "revolutionary action" took place at the revival?
3. What was the effect of the Black fighter, Joe Louis' victory over his white opponent?
4. How did Marguerite become friends with Louise Kendricks?
5. Why was the friendship with Louise so important to Marguerite?

Chapters 22-24

1. How did Marguerite feel about the ghost stories that the customers told in the Store?
2. How did Mrs. Taylor's funeral affect Marguerite?
3. How did Momma interpret Mr. Taylor's vision/dream of his dead wife?
4. Why did Marguerite receive presents from Momma, Bailey, Louise, and others?
5. What happened at graduation that gave Marguerite a presentiment of worse things to come?
6. Describe the graduation speaker.
7. What was Marguerite's reaction to the graduation speech?
8. What happened to get Marguerite back into a better mood?
9. How did the white dentist treat Momma’s request to have him take care of Marguerite's toothache?

10. What retribution did Momma demand of Dr. Lincoln for his treatment of her and Marguerite?

**Chapters 25-29**

1. What did Maya Angelou think was the real reason Momma took her and Bailey to live in California with their parents?

2. What was the enigma of which Maya Angelou spoke?

3. What was the secret world given to Marguerite by Mrs. Flowers?

4. How did Bailey and Marguerite feel about their mother's nervousness on the drive from Los Angeles to San Francisco?

5. How did Bailey and Marguerite learn there were other people in the world?


7. What two events happened at this time in Marguerite's life?

8. What happened to the population of San Francisco's Fillmore district during the early months of World War II?

9. How does the author describe Miss Kirwin, her teacher at George Washington High School?

10. Who, according to the author, is the hero in the Black American ghetto?

**Chapters 30-33**

1. Where did Marguerite spend her summer vacation?

2. Describe Marguerite's relationship with Dolores.

3. What insight did Marguerite have into her father's personality on their trip to Mexico?

4. What happened to her father while they were at the Mexican bar?

5. How did Marguerite and Daddy Bailey get home from the Mexican town?

6. What was Marguerite's father's reaction when he found out she had a car accident?

7. How did the fight between Marguerite and Dolores start?

8. What did Marguerite do when she left her father's friends' house?
9. Describe Bailey's and Mother's relationship at this point.

10. How did Mother and Bailey resolve their feud?

**Chapters 34-36**

1. What job did Marguerite want to get, and was she successful?

2. How does Maya Angelou describe the change in her when the spring classes began?

3. According to the author, what forces assault the young Black female?

4. According to the author, why does the adult American Negro female emerge as such a formidable character?

5. What new problem did Marguerite face as a result of reading The Well of Loneliness?

6. How did Mother respond to Marguerite's questions about her body?

7. What was Marguerite's solution to her still-present concern over her sexual preferences?

8. What happened to Marguerite as a result of her seduction of the good-looking young man?

9. How did her parents react to her news?

10. Explain Vivian Baxter's statement: "See, you don't have to think about doing the right thing. If you're for the right thing, then you do it without thinking."