

I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS

Grade Level: 8

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Length of Unit: 15 Lessons

I. ABSTRACT

In this Core Knowledge unit, students will study Maya Angelou's first autobiography, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. They will explore the impact of the environment and personal relationships on Angelou's life. Lessons will include opportunities for students to develop their own writing as well as reflect upon what Angelou has to say. In addition the students will develop a realistic feel for the different settings of the autobiography through the use of visual arts, the paintings of Jacob Lawrence (Visual Arts: Grade 8) and a review of American Musical Traditions (Music: Grade 5).

II. OVERVIEW

A. Concept Objectives:

1. Students will understand that characters undergo a transformation due to events in their lives,
2. Students will understand how the environment plays a major role in human development.
3. Students will develop a sense of historical empathy by connecting personal experiences, information, insights, and ideas with the experiences of others.
4. Students will determine and understand how the author's perspective or point of view affects the text.

B. Content from the *Core Knowledge Sequence*:

1. Autobiography: I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, English 8
2. Paintings of Jacob Lawrence, Visual Arts 8

C. Skills to be taught: Point of view, uniqueness of autobiography as a genre, review characterization, plot, narrator, setting, and relate music to culture, history and society

III. BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

- A. For teachers: I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou, PBS Home Video: Maya Angelou, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings abridged audiotapes read by the author.
- B. For students: story elements, the Depression from 7th grade history strand.

IV. RESOURCES

I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou
"Maya Angelou", sound cassette
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, abridged sound cassette read by the author
"Maya Angelou", PBS Home Video
The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou
"Lift Every Voice and Sing" by James Weldon Johnson
Migration of Negroes series by Jacob Lawrence

V. LESSONS

Lesson One: Introduce I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

A. Daily Objectives:

1. Lesson Content: Explore the title of the autobiography

2. Concept Objective: Students will understand and determine how the author's perspective or point of view affects text
 3. Skill Objective: build background, access prior knowledge, and set purpose for reading
- B. List materials: the cover of the book on colored transparency or enlarged, the poem "Sympathy" by P. Dunbar, and the poem "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" by Maya Angelou
- C. Background notes
- D. Key vocabulary:
1. Excerpts - a piece of the work not the whole work.
 2. Autobiography - nonfiction essay, diary, or book about oneself
- E. Procedures/Activities
1. Build background and access prior knowledge by asking students whether they have heard of Maya Angelou or not.
 2. If the answer is yes, make a list on the board or overhead of the things the students know about or have read about her.
 3. If no, explain or read a brief biography to the students.
 4. Explain to the students that they are about to read excerpts of an autobiography (review these terms if necessary). Display the cover of the book. Ask for commentary about the title.
 5. Explain that the title was taken from the poem "Sympathy."
 6. Distribute copies to the students.
 7. Read the poem out loud and ask for commentary. Re-visit the cover of the book and help the students make connections and develop questions they wish to be answered while they read the book. Explain that after they have read the excerpts, they may have answers to their questions.
- F. Evaluation/Assessment
1. Give a vocabulary quiz over key terms. Students will be given the word but must supply the definition. In addition, students should be able to answer the question, "What is the title of the book?" and "Who is the author of the book we will be reading?"
 2. Students will make a list of their questions and exchange them with a partner. The partner will star one or two particularly interesting ones and share with the class. Informally check and assess student understanding.

Lesson Two: Chapter One

- A. Daily Objectives:
1. Lesson Content:
 - a. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
 - b. Elements of fiction
 2. Concept Objective: Students will determine and understand how the author's perspective or point of view affects the text
 3. Skill Objective: to understand the differences and similarities of autobiography and fiction, namely characters, plot, organization and narrator
- B. List materials: Chapter 1, colored 3 x 5 cards (yellow, blue, and green) 4 or 5 for each student, a ziploc bag, and masking tape, chapter 1 audio cassette, paper and pen.
- C. Background notes
- D. Key vocabulary:
1. segregation - separation of groups by race
 2. calamitous - a disaster

- E. Procedures/activities
1. After the students have read the first chapter silently, they will listen to the tape of the first chapter.
 2. Each student will receive 4 or 5 of each color of index cards.
 3. Have students label each blue card “autobiography”, each yellow card “fiction” and each green card “ways autobiography and fiction are alike.”
 4. Model for the students how to fill out each card by saying for example, “autobiographies and fictional stories are alike because they both contain characters. Write this information under a green card. Further explain to the students that use of green is symbolic of yellow and blue making green. This will help them remember the similarities.
 5. Students will get into groups to finish their cards.
 6. Once finished, each student will have a set of cards.
 7. The teacher will compile a master list of all student information on the overhead or board by creating three columns with the necessary headings. This will enable the students to clarify and check their information.
 8. For storage purposes, issue each student a ziploc bag and a strip of masking tape. They will write their names on the masking tape and tape it to the bag. Index cards will be placed in the bag.
- F. Evaluation/Assessment:
1. Check the index cards for accuracy of information. Also, have students write a compare and contrast essay using the information they have gathered.
- G. Standard Test Connection: Reading TAAS Objective 1: context clues, Objective 3: summarization.

Lesson Three: Arkansas

- A. Daily Objectives:
1. Lesson Content:
 - a. “My Arkansas”
 - b. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
 2. Concept Objective: Students will understand how the environment plays a major role in human development
 3. Skill Objective/standard: identify setting
- B. List materials: Chapter 1 book and tapes, PBS Video, poem “My Arkansas,” cotton bolls, movie “Places in the Heart,” paper, and pen.
- C. Background notes
- D. Key vocabulary:
1. rural- country or countryside
 2. Agrarian- farming community
 3. Migration- movement of people
 4. The Store- the Johnson store and home
 5. Cotton boll- cotton in its raw form
- E. Procedures/activities
1. Ask students what they know about life in the rural south in the 1930’s. Students may want to mention what they have learned from the chapter as well as information they have derived from other sources.
 2. View the video segments dealing with life in Stamps. Tell students to play close attention to what Angelou says about the cotton pickers.
 3. Have a class discussion about what she says in the video, and lead students to pick out information from Chapter One to further their understanding. Read the

- poem “My Arkansas” to gain another perspective of the importance of this setting to the characters.
4. Have students write about a place they remember from their early childhood. Write the following places on the board to aid the students: neighborhood, magical places, home, park, store.
 5. Students should develop their topics strongly through the use of all five senses.
- F. Evaluation/assessment: Students will share their finished essays with the class by exchanging papers and reading each others work silently. Comments about the papers will be written on a separate sheet of paper and shared with the student. Both the essay and the reflection will be saved for later use.
- G. Standard Test Connection: Reading TAAS Objective 1: context clues, Objective 2: supporting ideas, Objective 5: literary elements

Lesson Four: Chapter 2

- A. Write daily objective for each lesson:
 1. Lesson Content:
 - a. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
 - b. Characterization
 2. Concept Objective: Students will understand that characters undergo transformation due to events in their lives
 3. Skill Objective/standard: identify the character’s traits, motivations, conflicts, and relationships
- B. List materials: Chapter 2, butcher paper and markers, task cards (see procedure for information which needs to be placed on task cards ahead of time).
- C. Background Notes
- D. Key vocabulary:
 1. disciplinarian- person of authority who hands out the punishment
 2. to thwart- to stop
 3. whipping boy- a person abused in place of someone or something else
- E. Procedures/activities:
 1. Begin by leading the students through a summarization of Chapter 2 by each student writing a one-sentence summary of each paragraph
 2. Next, explain that Angelou develops the characters richly in her story and that she makes an active choice on which of the real people to develop and which ones to just mention.
 3. Review the different aspects of characterization including physical and mental development.
 4. Break the students into groups of no more than 3 per group.
 5. Give each group a sheet of butcher paper, a marker, and a task card.

Task 1: Re-read the chapter paying close attention to how Angelou describes the physical aspects of Uncle Willie and write these down on scratch paper. Write a five-sentence paragraph using the physical descriptions. Then, draw a picture on the butcher paper about how Uncle Willie would look being faithful to clothing of the time period.

Task 2: Re-read the chapter paying close attention to Uncle Willie’s emotions. Feelings manifest themselves by action. How does Uncle Willie deal with being handicapped? In the group, discuss your own reactions to handicapped individuals. After this discussion, the group will need to determine why Uncle Willie needed to perform normally for the teachers. How would the teachers have reacted to Uncle Willie if they knew he was “lame?” Write and perform a scene in which Uncle Willie does not

disguise his handicap. The scene should include Uncle Willie's reactions as well as the reactions of the teachers.

Task 3: In the time period when Angelou was growing up, people with handicaps were treated cruelly and unfairly. Make a list of words in the chapter related to Uncle Willie's condition. Make a list beside each word from the chapter, write a different word that would be used now to describe individuals with handicaps. In a five-sentence paragraph, explain how Uncle Willie would be treated in today's time period. What services would be available to him? Draw a picture on butcher paper of the way that Uncle Willie could look now if he was able to take advantage of modern resources available. Library research may be needed.

- F. Evaluation/Assessment: All work should be presented to the class with an explanation about why each group did what they did. Grade on the following rubric. 4= all work done neatly, all information is accurate, presentation is clear. 3=nice work but lacking in one area. 2= fair work, unclear information 1=poor work with little effort.
- G. Standard Test Connection: Reading TAAS Objective 5: literary elements, Objective 6: author's purpose.

Lesson Five: Chapter 4

- A. Write daily objective for each lesson:
 - 1. Lesson Content:
 - a. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
 - b. Characterization
 - 2. Concept Objective: Students will determine and understand how the author's perspective or point of view affects the text.
 - 3. Skill Objective: understand how the author uses comparing and contrasting techniques to develop the differences between her brother and herself.
- B. List materials: Chapter 4 starting with paragraph 9 and ending with paragraph 18, Lifetime video portion of Angelou speaking about Bailey, the abridged tape, paper and pen.
- C. Background Notes
- D. Key vocabulary
 - 1. self-concept- how a person views himself or herself
- E. Procedures/activities
 - 1. Before reading Chapter 4, have students divide their paper into two columns. Head one Bailey and the other Marguerite. Read the passage and have students fill out their charts with information on how Angelou describes herself and Bailey. Direct students to include behavior as well as physical appearance. Students will stop at the end of paragraph 18.
 - 2. Once finished, students will write questions pertaining to this section. Use these questions as a discussion of this section by having students read aloud their question while other students give answers to the questions orally. Students will use their charts as evidence when explaining their answers.
 - 3. Listen to Angelou read this section of the tape, which is particularly powerful.
- E. Evaluation/assessment: Informally check students' understanding by looking at their questions. In addition, informally assess whether or not questions are answered accurately.
- G. Standard Test Connection: Reading TAAS Objective 5: literary elements

Lesson Six: Chapter 4, Continued

- A. Write daily objective for each lesson:
 - 1. Lesson Content: I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
 - 2. Concept Objective: Students will develop a sense of historical empathy by connecting personal experiences, information, insights, and ideas with the experiences of others.
 - 3. Skill Objective: understand the emotions and actions of characters
- B. List materials: remainder of Chapter 4 up to the last 2 paragraphs, Chapter 5 beginning 6th paragraph, tapes of the abridged book
- C. Background Notes
- D. Key Vocabulary
- E. Procedures/activities:
 - 1. Before reading the remainder of Chapter 4, ask this question, “Are there any places in our town/city where you feel unsafe?” “Why?” Entertain several answers
 - 2. Students will think about the people that they may never have seen (example, Eskimos). How might they react when first encountering these people? How might these reactions be stereotypical?
 - 3. Be sensitive and prepare students appropriately for a girl wearing no underwear and its effect on the characters involved.
 - 4. Read Chapter 4 excerpts, and discuss Marguerite’s feelings.
 - 5. Explain the hierarchy between blacks and whites. Example, first upper class whites, then middle class whites, then poor whites, and finally everyone else regardless of class or education.
 - 6. Read Chapter 5 beginning with 6th paragraph silently first. It is best heard in Angelou’s own voice
- F. Evaluation/Assessment:
 - 1. Students will have a vocabulary quiz over all key terms given to this point. Teacher will supply the word and students will write the definition.
 - 2. Have students choose several quotes from Chapters 4 and 5 and record their reactions and emotional connections in a double-entry diary format.
- G. Standard Test Connection: Reading TAAS Objective 5: drawing conclusions

Lesson Seven: Music

- A. Write daily objective for each lesson:
 - 1. Lesson Content: I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
 - 2. Concept Objective: Students will develop a sense of historical empathy by connecting personal experiences, information, insights, and ideas with the experiences of others.
 - 3. Skill Objective: relate music to history, society, and culture.
- B. List materials: copies of spiritual or gospel music, songs sung during cotton picking season, chapter 6 paragraph 18 end before the sentence, “On the next Sunday...” chapter 7, second paragraph only, PBS tape of Angelou singing in church.
- C. Background notes
- D. Key vocabulary
 - 1. a revival- usually held during the summer time to bring people to the church
- E. Procedures/Activities
 - 1. After reading the material, listen to the music selections to get the feel of the time period.
 - 2. Students should develop questions related to music.
 - 3. View the videotape of Maya Angelou singing and explaining singing.

4. Discuss the role of this music in Arkansas as it relates to the cotton pickers and as it relates to blacks.
- F. Evaluation/Assessment: Students will write a one-sentence paragraph explaining the importance of music to the cotton pickers and to the blacks of the 1930's.
- G. Standard Test Connection: Reading TAAS Objective 5: drawing conclusions

Lesson Eight: One Christmas

- A. Write daily objective for each lesson:
 1. Lesson Content: I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
 2. Concept Objective: Students will determine and understand how the author's perspective or point of view effects text
 3. Skill Objective: understand the emotions of the characters
- B. List materials: Chapter 8 beginning with, "One Christmas..."
- C. Background Notes
- D. Key vocabulary:
 1. foreshadowing- the technique of hinting about an event that will occur later on in the story.
- E. Procedures/activities
 1. Read the Chapter 8 excerpt.
 2. Students will try to explain why Bailey and his sister reacted so negatively this particular Christmas to their presents.
 3. They will answer the question what is likely to happen after Christmas.
- F. Evaluation/Assessment: Through discussion, informally check for accurate and on-target predictions.
- G. Standard Test Connection: Reading TAAS Objective 6: author's purpose

Lesson Nine: Uncle Willie and Bailey Sr.

- A. Write daily objective for each lesson:
 1. Lesson Content: I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
 2. Concept Objective: Students will understand that characters undergo transformations due to events in their lives
 3. Skill Objective: compare and contrast, identify character traits, motivations, conflicts, relationships
- B. List materials: Chapter 2 and Chapter 9, notebook paper and pen
- C. Background notes
- D. Key vocabulary: "proper English"- the English Bailey Sr. uses which is "better" than the rest of his family.
- E. Procedures/activities:
 1. Read Chapter 9 silently.
 2. Listen to the tapes.
 3. Review what was written about Uncle Willie in Chapter 2.
 4. On a prepared overhead sheet or on the board (two columns, Willie, Bailey Sr.) make notes about the students' recollections of Uncle Willie and Bailey Sr.
 5. Remind students that people from the same family can have very different lives although they are from the same environment. Students will make a chart similar to the teacher chart about people in their lives (siblings, friends, and relatives).
 6. They will then write a compare and contrast essay using their charts.
- F. Evaluation/assessment: Evaluate the essay.
- G. Standard Test Connection: Reading TAAS Objective 5: literary elements

Lesson Ten: Chapter 10

- A. Write daily objective for each lesson:
 - 1. Lesson Content: I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
 - 2. Concept Objective: Students will understand how the environment plays a major role in human development
 - 2. Skill Objective: identify setting and its effects on characters
- B. List materials: Chapter 10 to paragraph 10. Jacob Lawrence series *Migration of Negroes* (paintings).
- C. Background Notes
- D. Key vocabulary
- E. Procedures/activities:
 - 1. Read the excerpts.
 - 2. Show the students the Jacob Lawrence paintings and refer to the knowledge they gained about people moving from south to north.
 - 3. Discuss, “What did the people hope they would receive?”
 - 4. Angelou and her brother leave Stamps reluctantly, students will explain the kind of grandmother they left as compared to the one they receive.
 - 5. Writing activity: compare your grandmothers if possible. Give students alternatives, if they do not know their grandmothers. For instance, they could use grandfathers or they could speak to their parents and use their parents’ recollections
- F. Evaluation/Assessment: Assess written assignment. In addition, check for understanding by having the students verbally or in written form summarize the importance of black migration.
- G. Standard Test Connection: Reading TAAS Objective 6: author's purpose

Lesson Eleven: A Traumatic Event

- A. Write daily objective for each lesson:
 - 1. Lesson Content: I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
 - 2. Concept Objective: Students will understand that characters undergo transformation due to the events in their lives.
 - 3. Skill Objective: understand the emotions of the character
- B. List materials: PBS Video on Maya, Chapter 14
- C. Background Notes
- D. Key vocabulary
- E. Procedures/Activities:
 - 1. It is important but difficult to explain to students what happened to Maya that caused her to stop speaking. Use the video and avoid the text and the audiocassette. She explains it simply without any graphic scenes in the video. Preview this portion of the video first.
 - 2. After viewing this 2 to 3 minute portion, have students read Chapter 14 silently. It deals with Maya’s return to Stamps and the effect that her refusal to speak has on those around her.
 - 3. Give students the opportunity to write with the freedom that the teacher will not read the information. Allow them to share or not share what they have written with someone in class.
- F. Evaluation/Assessment: Ask the students, “What was Maya going through at this point in her life?” Have students answer in written format.

Lesson Twelve: Mrs. Flowers

- A. Write daily objective for each lesson:
 - 1. Lesson Content: I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
 - 2. Concept Objective: understand that characters undergo transformations due to events in their lives
 - 3. Skill Objective: relationship of characters
- B. List materials: Chapter 15
- C. Background Notes
- D. Key vocabulary
- E. Procedures/activities
 - 1. Read Chapter 15
 - 2. Students will answer the following questions either in written form or through discussion
 - 3. Why is Maya embarrassed by the way her grandmother speaks? In what other ways is Maya ashamed of her? What are some concerns that Maya has that the average ten year old may also have?
 - 4. Mrs. Flowers teaches Maya some important lessons. What are they, and how are they significant?
 - 5. How is Mrs. Flowers a role model?
 - 6. Students will write a short sketch describing an important encounter with a teacher or other adult who has influenced their lives. Students will explain what change this adult has brought about in them.
- D. Evaluation/assessment: Check writing for content
- E. Standard Test Connection: Reading TAAS Objective 6: author's purpose

Lesson Thirteen: Names

- A. Write daily objective for each lesson:
 - 1. Lesson Content: I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
 - 2. Concept Objective: Students will develop a sense of historical empathy by connecting personal experiences, information, insights
 - 3. Skill Objective:
- B. List materials: Chapter 10 paragraph 22 and Chapter 16
- C. Background Notes
- D. Key vocabulary
- E. Procedures/activities
 - 1. Ask the students, "How do our names define us? How did you get your name? How do you feel when people misspell or mispronounce your name? If you could name yourself, what would your name be?"
 - 2. Read the excerpts and discuss Maya's reactions and how the students would have reacted in Maya's place.
 - 3. Have the students form a lengthy written response about each question listed in #1 after reading the excerpts. Or, let them write an acrostic poem to describe themselves using their name. Another option is an acrostic poem describing Angelou using her name.
- F. Evaluation/Assessment:
 - 1. Assess student writing.
 - 2. The teacher will make a discussion chart for the class. To make a discussion chart, write the students' names down the left-hand side. To the right of each

name should be about ten squares. Use the discussion chart by making a mark each time the student contributes to the discussion. Use the discussion chart to evaluate each student's participation.

- G. Standard Test Connection: Reading TAAS Objective 5: literary elements

Lesson Fourteen: Eighth Grade Graduation

- A. Write daily objective for each lesson:
1. Lesson Content: I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
 2. Concept Objective: develop a sense of historical empathy by connecting personal experiences, information, insights, and ideas with the experiences of others.
 3. Skill Objective: Understand characters' emotions
- B. List materials: Chapter 23, "Lift Every Voice and Sing," the abridged tape
- C. Background notes
- D. Key vocabulary
1. invictus
 2. valedictory address- speech given by the highest ranking graduate
- E. Procedures/activities
1. After reading Chapter 23, have students listen to the abridged portion on tape.
 2. Pass out copies of "Lift Every Voice and Sing."
 3. Before reading it ask why Henry Reed began singing it? Why did every one join in? Why were we on top again?
 4. Examine the song stanza by stanza for clues to its importance to the people that evening.
 5. In written format, have the students describe the how the emotions of all the people change from the beginning of the chapter to the end.
 6. Finally listen to Angebu read this portion on tape.
- F. Evaluation/Assessment
1. Assess student writing using rubric from Lesson Four.
- G. Standard Test Connection: Reading TAAS Objective 5: make inferences and draw conclusions

Lesson Fifteen: Summation

- A. Write daily objective for each lesson:
1. Lesson Content: I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
 2. Concept Objective: Students will understand that characters undergo a transformation due to events in their lives.
 3. Skill Objective: summarize, identify cause and effect, sequence
- B. List materials: Blue and red strips of paper (2 inches wide 8 inches long) markers, and the excerpts from the autobiography
- C. Background Notes
- D. Key vocabulary
- E. Procedures/activities
1. Now that the excerpts have been read, students will make a cause and effect chain. Pass out the materials to students in cooperative groups.
 2. Begin by leading the students through a discussion of the first major move in Maya's life and the event that preceded it. Write these events on the board as cause and effect.
 3. Show how to write a cause on a blue strip and an effect on the red strip.
 4. Allow the students to proceed by continuing to do this activity throughout the rest of the excerpts.

5. Make a chain by first creating a loop with the first blue cause. Show students how to connect the effect to the cause by forming a connecting loop. Continue until all strips are connected in a blue, red sequence.
- F. Evaluation/assessment: Students will compare their strips to the teacher master chain to check for correctness.
- E. Standard Test Connection: Reading TAAS Objective 4: cause and effect

VI Culminating Activity:

Students will have the opportunity to read Maya Angelou's poetry and create poetry of their own. This poetry and all work that reflects the students' inner feelings and memories that have been done during this unit will be used to create a scrapbook. When Maya Angelou returned to Stamps, Arkansas, a scrapbook which she created as a child was returned to her. Students will view this portion of the video and then decide upon a creative way to present their reflections. Students will "see" that they have the beginnings of their own autobiography and will be encouraged to continue adding pieces of work to it as they move through life. Finished scrapbooks will be on display (with the owner's permission) in the classroom.

VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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