

Name _____

Date _____

Maya Angelou - Answer Key

Use the text to answer each question below.

1. Maya Angelou's most famous work, **I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings**, is the first volume in her seven-part autobiography. In it, the author recalls her tumultuous childhood spent moving between Stamps, Arkansas, and St. Louis, Missouri. It spans Angelou's life from ages 3 to 16, and includes brutal scenes of racism, poverty, and sexual assault. Angelou also depicts her bond with her older brother, Bailey, who becomes a father figure and confidant. The book explores the nature of trauma, its effects on a young person's development, and the specter of racism in the early 20th-century American South. Through the turmoil, Angelou found strength in her identity as a Black woman, a young mother, and lover of literature—all of which the book identifies as key to her survival and sense of self.

Based on the passage, which of these is the primary theme of **I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings**?



- A. Finding purpose and joy in a hopeless situation is the key to survival.

According to the passage, the book describes Angelou's "tumultuous childhood" and "includes brutal scenes of racism, poverty, and sexual assault." But "through the turmoil, Angelou found strength in her identity as a Black woman, a young mother, and lover of literature—all of which the book identifies as key to her survival and sense of self."

- B. Poverty leads people to desperation.

- C. In the early 20th century, factory workers were often abused and mistreated for little pay.

- D. The differences between the northern and southern United States led to Angelou's disorienting childhood.

2. Maya Angelou moved to New York City in the 1950s, where she joined the Harlem Writers' Guild. The Guild, comprised of Black American writers who lived throughout New York City, formed in response to their frustrations at the primarily White literary establishment. Many of the participants had not yet published their work. They met regularly at a storefront in Harlem, reading and responding to each other's writing. The group focused on introducing new voices to the American literary canon. The Guild also participated in civil and labor rights activism, with many of the members belonging to progressive political parties and advocating for the independence movements occurring in many African nations. The Guild is still active today, continuing its mission of uplifting African America writers.

Which of these is a mission of the Harlem Writers' Guild?

- A. To establish a literary canon of Black American writers
- B. To provide members with feedback from their peers
- C. To offer support for civil and labor rights movements



D.

All of the above

According to the text, the Harlem Writers' Guild focused on "reading and responding to each others' writing," "introducing new voices to the American literary canon," and "participated in civil and labor rights activism."

3. Angelou never received a college degree, but she was awarded more than 50 honorary degrees from schools including Smith College, Howard University, Columbia University, and Boston College. She was appointed a professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University. At the inauguration of President Bill Clinton in 1993, Angelou read an original poem, "On the Pulse of Morning," becoming the second poet ever to do so. In 2010 she received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in the United States, from President Barack Obama. Angelou died at the age of 86 on May 28, 2014, at her home in North Carolina. Her legacy includes seven autobiographical novels, several collections of poetry and three books of essays. She had been working on a new book when she passed away.

What can you infer from the passage?

- A. Bill Clinton was Angelou's favorite president.



B.

Angelou stayed busy and productive even later in life.

According to the passage, Angelou "had been working on a new book when she passed away" "at the age of 86," indicating she remained busy and productive late in her life.

- C. Angelou discovered that teaching was her true passion.
- D. Barack Obama was not a fan of Angelou's work but felt pressured to give her an award.

