“Caged Bird” Discussion Questions

Get your poem out to view while you contemplate this incredible poem.

Put your answers below each question.

STANZA 1 of “Caged Bird”

1. Where is this bird?

Is it in the air or in water?

What is it doing exactly?

2. What comes to mind when you think of *leaping on the back of something*?

Why does Angelou use this idea here?

3. What is the mood of this stanza?

What is the attitude or disposition of the bird?

4. What does it mean to *claim the sky*?

What does it mean to *dare* to claim the sky?

To demonstrate the importance of poetic language, here is how the stanza might look sans imagery:

A free bird catches

a gust of wind

and flies down

till he runs out of wind

and lowers his wings

in the sunlight

in his sky.

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STANZA 2

1. What image comes to mind when you hear the word *stalk*?

What does it mean? What kinds of animals do this and for what purpose?

How does that image contribute to meaning in lines 1 and 2?

2. How can *bars be made of rage*?

If bars are made of rage, what does that suggest about the entity behind those bars?

Why can’t the bird see through the bars most of the time?

Why can he see through the bars occasionally? What might he see?

3. How might a bird feel about having his *wings clipped* and his *feet tied*?

4. Why does Angelou write that the bird *opens his throat to sing*?

Wouldn’t bird *open* its mouth/beak to *sing*?

Angelou could have just written that the bird sings, so why does she include the *opening* of *anything?*

This is how stanza two might look sans imagery:

But a bird that walks

the length of his narrow cage

can seldom see through

the bars

his wings are clipped and

his feet are tied

so he sings.

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STANZA 3

1. Why does the caged bird sing with a *trill*? Trill = a quavering, vibratory, warbling sound

2. Why is it a *fearful* trill? Who’s afraid?

3. How can a bird *long* for *things* he doesn’t *know*?

4. If the bird is in a cage, probably in a house, how is his tune heard on the *distant hill*?

5. Do caged birds sing of freedom? How do bird owners react to the bird’s song?

This is how stanza two might look sans imagery:

The bird sings

with a vibrating sound

and about things he doesn’t know about

but wants to have

and his song is heard

on a hill that’s far away

because the bird

sings about freedom

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STANZA 4

1. Why does the free bird think of another breeze? What was the first one?

2. What are the trade winds?

Why are the trade winds soft and why does it come through sighing trees?

Why are the trees sighing?

3.Why does the bird think about fat worms? What are they waiting for on a dawn bright lawn?

What is a dawn bright lawn?

4. Why can the bird name the sky his own? What does that mean?

What other line resembles this one?

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STANZA 5

1. Why does this stanza begin with the word *but*?

2. Why did the article change from *the* bird to *a* bird?

How does that impact meaning?

3. Why does the bird stand *on the grave of dreams?*

Why is the bird standing? Why is it standing *on* the grave as opposed to beside it?

What is the grave?

4. Why does his shadow *shout* instead of the bird?

What comes to mind with the word *shadow*?

What is a *nightmare scream*?

Why does the bird shout *on* it instead of just shouting a nightmare scream?

5. Why does Angelou repeat lines 13-14 in lines 25-26?

When did she condense those three lines into two? This is a modern poem, so she is not obligated to any particular line length or pattern. Does this poem have any kind of pattern?

STANZA 6

1. Why is this stanza a repeat of tree? And don’t just say “emphasis.”

How many times does Angelou repeat words, lines, or stanzas?

Provide line numbers and specific words, lines, or stanzas.