

# Maya Angelou

Maya Angelou is one of the best-known writers in the United States. She has had many struggles in her life. Maya used those struggles to become a role model for other people.

Maya was born in 1928. When she was three years old, she went to live with her grandmother. Her grandmother lived in Stamps, Arkansas. Back then, the law in Arkansas said that African American people had to live in a different place than white people. The African American part of Stamps was very poor. Maya's childhood was difficult. She was not always treated fairly because she was African American.

Maya's grandmother owned a grocery store. Her grandmother was a strong person. She **explained** to Maya that it was important to get a good education. She made sure Maya took her **schooling** seriously and studied hard. At school, Maya became friends with her teacher, Mrs. Flowers. Mrs. Flowers taught Maya about famous writers. The **training** that Mrs. Flowers gave Maya worked well. Maya began to love reading and writing. Soon she was writing **compositions** of her own.

When Maya was older, she moved away from Stamps. She lived in many different places. She did many kinds of jobs. Then Maya decided to be a writer. She **practiced** writing whenever she could so that she could get better at it. In 1969, Maya wrote *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. This book was about her childhood. Many people loved her book. This made her famous. She began to travel to many places. She gave speeches about her life. She got many honors and awards for her writing and her speeches.

In 1993, Bill Clinton became the President of the United States. He asked Maya to read one of her poems at the ceremony. Maya read a poem into the microphone and millions of people in America got to hear it. This was an exciting day for Maya.

Through all her struggles, Maya never stopped working. She never gave up. Instead, she shared her stories. Now others can learn from Maya's struggles.

**COMPREHENSION** What are some words that tell about how Maya Angelou learned? In what way has Maya shared her life with other people?







# The Queen and the Peach Girl

Once there was a queen who was said to be the **wisest**, smartest person in the land. She knew about plants, animals, stars, books, and numbers. She used her skill at **reasoning** to make careful decisions and good choices for her kingdom.

But the queen knew that she would not be queen forever. She wanted the next leader of the kingdom to be just as wise as she was. Now, the queen was **open-minded** about who would replace her. The next leader did not have to be a prince or a princess. The queen was willing to pick the daughter of a farmer or the son of a carpenter—as long as the person was wise. So she thought of the following riddle and sent it throughout the land: *What is a tree with no branches, no leaves, no trunk, and no roots? Whoever finds this tree shall be the next King or Queen of the land.*

“Impossible!” the people cried. “Every **sensible** person who has ever seen a tree knows that it must have branches, leaves, a trunk, and roots!”

However, one girl, the daughter of a peach farmer, was determined to find the answer. She was a curious girl, always eager to learn new things. She picked a peach to eat while she tried to solve the problem. Just when she thought she would never find the answer, the girl ate the last bite of her peach. In her hand lay the pit, the peach’s seed. The answer to the queen’s question struck her like lightning. She ran to the palace.

“Here is your tree,” said the girl to the queen. She showed the peach pit. “It has no branches, no leaves, no trunk, and no roots, but plant it in the ground and it will grow into a tree.”

“That is correct!” said the queen to the girl. “You are smart, and you know how to solve a difficult problem. As you get older and gain more knowledge, I believe you will have the **wisdom** to rule this kingdom well. Congratulations, Peach Girl, someday you will be the next queen of this land!”

**COMPREHENSION** Why does eating a peach help the girl answer the queen’s question? What words help you understand what it means to be wise?



