

'STILL I RISE' MAYA ANGELOU

BACKGROUND

Maya Angelou was an American poet, writer, singer, composer, actor, director, lecturer and civil rights activist. Her illustrious career, which spanned six decades, won her both fame and critical acclaim as well as numerous awards and honorary degrees. Her work centres on such themes as racism, family, women and identity, and she is an important figure in the black literary tradition.

She has written seven autobiographies, which include *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and *A Song Flung up to Heaven*. Her candid discussion of her life and background as well as the range of her artistic talent and expression has made her an inspiration to many.

BEFORE YOU START READING

- 1 Read about slavery in the United States of America.
- 2 Everyone wants to be treated fairly and become angry if treated unfairly. But are you always fair to other people? Talk about situations where you might have behaved unfairly.
- 3 Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822) was a major Romantic poet who wrote that 'poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world'. Throughout history, poetry has been used as a medium of protest and a call to social change. Do some research to find examples of poetry of protest. You could also look at the work of modern-day rap and hip hop artists, and at the way in which pop music has become a medium through which social and political issues are addressed.

sassiness Lively spiritedness, sometimes considered cheeky.

oil wells In the 19th and early 20th century the discovery of oil and the rapid growth of the petroleum industry made oil an integral part of the US economy and a symbol of wealth.



▲ The oil industry grew rapidly in the US in the 19th and early 20th century.

▼ 'STILL I RISE' BY MAYA ANGELOU

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my **sassiness** upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got **oil wells**
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?

The poet
resistance
indomitable

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