

## Olentangy Local School District Literature Selection Review

Teacher:	Switzer	School:	LMS
Book Title:	I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings	Genre:	Autobiography
Author:	Angelou, Maya	Pages:	289
Publisher:	Ballentine	Copyright:	1969

*In a brief rationale, please provide the following information relative to the book you would like added to the school's book collection for classroom use. You may attach additional pages as needed.*

**Book Summary and summary citation:** (suggested resources include book flap summaries, review summaries from publisher, book vendors, etc.)  
Sent by their mother to live with their devout, self-sufficient grandmother in a small Southern town, Maya and her brother, Bailey, endure the ache of abandonment and the prejudice of the local "powhitetrash." At eight years old and back at her mother's side in St. Louis, Maya is attacked by a man many times her age—and has to live with the consequences for a lifetime. Years later, in San Francisco, Maya learns about love for herself and the kindness of others, her own strong spirit, and the ideas of great authors ("I met and fell in love with William Shakespeare") will allow her to be free instead of imprisoned.

Poetic and powerful, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is a modern American classic that will touch hearts and change minds for as long as people read. From amazon.com

**Provide an instructional rationale for the use of this title, including specific reference to the OLSD curriculum map(s):** (Curriculum maps may be referenced by grade/course and indicator number or curriculum maps with indicators highlighted may be attached to this form)

CC Rdg Standards 1-3 Key Ideas & Details

CC Rdg Standards 4-6 Author's Craft & Structure

CC Rdg Standards 7-9 Integration of Knowledge & Ideas with additional fiction & non-fiction text

**Include two professional reviews of this title:** (a suggested list of resources for identifying professional reviews is shown below. Reviews may be "cut and pasted" (with citation) into the form or printed reviews may be attached to the form)

### Review #1

Publishers Weekly - Publisher's Weekly

As in *Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now*, famed poet and author Angelou (*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*) casts a keen eye inward and bares her soul in a slim volume of personal essays. This collection is narrower in scope than Angelou's earlier book and the sense of racial pride is stronger, more compelling. But all of her opinions are deeply rooted and most are conveyed with a combination of humility, personable intelligence and wit. Like a modern-day Kahlil Gibran, Angelou offers insights on a wide range of topics—Africa, aging, self-reflection, independence and the importance of understanding both the historical truth of the African American experience and the art that truth inspired. Women are a recurrent topic, and in "A Song to Sensuality," she writes of the misconceptions the young (her younger self included) have of aging. "They Came to Stay" is a particularly inspirational piece paying homage to black women: "Precious jewels all." Even Oprah Winfrey (to whom the previous collection was dedicated) serves as subject matter and is likened to "the desperate traveler who teaches us the most profound lesson and affords us the most exquisite

thrills." In her final essay, Angelou uses the story of the prodigal son to remind readers of the value of solitude: "In the silence we listen to ourselves. Then we ask questions of ourselves. We describe ourselves to ourselves, and in the quietude we may even hear the voice of God."

Review #2

NY Times Book Review

The wisdom, rue and humor of her storytelling are borne on a lilting rhythm completely her own, the product of a born writer's senses nourished on black church singing and preaching, soft mother talk and salty street talk, and on literature: James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, Shakespeare and Gorki.

**What alternate text(s) could also fulfill the instructional requirements?**

Title: **Black Like Me by Griffin** Author:

Title: **Up From Slavery by Booker T Washington** Author:

Title: **Narrative of the Life of Frederick T  
Douglass** Author:

Title: Author:

Title: Author:

Title: Author:

**Document any potentially controversial content:**

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings is the autobiographical telling about the writer and poet's early years. It is a story that demonstrates how strength of character and a love of literature can help overcome racism and trauma. The book begins when three-year-old Maya and her older brother are sent to live with their grandmother and ends when Maya becomes a mother at the age of 17. Through the years Maya transforms from a victim of racism with an inferiority complex into a self-assured, dignified young woman who is commanding as a civil rights activist. Angelou's autobiography explores subjects such as identity, rape, racism, and literacy with intelligence and sophistication; she also writes about the state of women's lives in a male-dominated society.

In 2011, TIME magazine named the book one of the 100 best and most influential books written in English since the beginning of the publication in 1923. It has been used in high schools and universities, and the book has been celebrated for creating new literary avenues for the American memoir. However, the book's graphic portrayal of childhood rape, racism, and sexuality has caused it to be challenged or banned in some schools and libraries- I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings has had thirty-nine public challenges or bans since 1983. From <http://bannedbooks.world.edu/2011/10/30/banned-books-awareness-caged-bird-sings/>

**Keeping in mind the age, academic level, and maturity of the intended reader, what is the suggested classroom use: (check all that apply)**

Gifted/Accelerated  Regular  At Risk

**GRADE LEVEL(S):** 6  7  8  9  10  11  12

**Reading level of this title (if applicable):** Reading Level

Grade level Equivalent: 5.5

Lexile Measure®: 1070

**Date Submitted to Department Chair:** 12/20/12

**Suggested Professional Literary Review Sources:**

School Library Journal

Horn Book

Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books

VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)

Library Journal

Book Links

Publisher's Weekly

Booklist

Kirkus Review

Wilson Library Catalog

English Journal (and other resources of the National Council of Teachers of English)

The Reading Teacher (International Reading Association)

Literature for Today's Young Adults