

Fable for When There's No Way Out

Grown too big for his skin,
and it grown hard,

without a sea and atmosphere—
he's drunk it all up—

5 his strength's inside him now,
but there's no room to stretch.

He pecks at the top
but his beak's too soft;

10 though instinct or ambition shoves,
he can't get through.

Barely old enough to bleed
and already bruised!

In a case this tough
what's the use

15 if you break your head
instead of the lid?

Despair tempts him
to just go limp:

Maybe the cell's
20 already a tomb,

and beginning end
in this round room.

Still, stupidly he pecks
and pecks, as if from under

25 his own skull—
yet makes no crack . . .

No crack until
he finally cracks,

and kicks and stomps.
30 What a thrill

and shock to feel
his little gaff¹ poke

through the floor!
A way he hadn't known or meant.

35 Rage works if reason won't.
When locked up, bear down.

1. *gaff* (gaf), here the bony, sharp spine on the back of a bird's leg.

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Fable for When There's No Way Out

grown up too fast, too hard
 Grown too big for his skin,
 and it grown hard,
 without a sea and atmosphere—
 he's drunk it all up—

he has an inner strength
 his strength's inside him now,
 but there's no room to stretch.
 He pecks at the top but his beak's too soft;
he tries to beat out the top but is too young/not tough enough
 though instinct or ambition shoves,
 he can't get through.
he has instinct = ambition
 Barely old enough to bleed
 and already bruised!

what's the use in trying it's too hard
 In a case this tough
 what's the use
 if you break your head
 instead of the lid?
breaking yourself or spirit instead of the barrier in the way

he's tempted to not try giving up is easier ~ give into the despair that is all around him
 Despair tempts him
 to just go limp:

Maybe the cell's already a tomb,
jail cell his death chamber
 and beginning end in this round room.
the end of his life = self will take place in the room
 Still, stupidly he pecks and pecks, as if from under
he still tries to break through the barrier in vain
 his own skull— yet makes no crack . . .
beating his own head with rage because he can't break through the barrier
 No crack until he finally cracks,
he cracks under the pressure of his life & circumstances
 and kicks and stomps.
he fights against it
 What a thrill
 and shock to feel his little gaff¹ poke
anger against himself affects only himself
 through the floor!
 A way he hadn't known or meant.
didn't realize or mean to do this to himself
 Rage works if reason won't.
 When locked up, bear down.
 MORAL—!

rage works in this case better than reason

1. gaff (gaf), here the bony, sharp spine on the back of a bird's leg.
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moral/theme: freedom from discrim. madness/anger

Symbolism - Cage = Social

*bird = discriminated person
 cracks = he stops, can't handle
 cell / tomb = death*

Caged Bird

Maya Angelou

A free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
5 and dips his wing
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage
10 can seldom see through
his bars of rage
his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
1 so he opens his throat to sing.

15 The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
2 and his tune is heard
20 on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds¹ soft through the sighing trees
25 and the fat worms waiting on a dawn-bright lawn
and he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied
30 so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
35 and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

1. *trade winds*, winds that blow almost continually on a course toward the equator.

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Caged Bird

Maya Angelou

person with freedom to dream: live its life

A free bird leaps on the back of the wind and floats downstream till the current ends and dips his wing in the orange sun rays and dares to claim the sky.

The free bird thinks of another breeze and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees and the fat worms waiting on a dawn-bright lawn and he names the sky his own.

his life is his own to do with what he wants

dares to dream

But a bird that stalks down his narrow cage can seldom see through his bars of rage his wings are clipped and his feet are tied so he opens his throat to sing.

person whose freedom is limited by others

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream his wings are clipped and his feet are tied so he opens his throat to sing.

his life is dictated by others dreams are dead: life a nightmare but still he sings of freedom

the person limited sings/hopes with fear for things it doesn't know but desires the song is heard from the constraints of life

The caged bird sings with a fearful trill of things unknown but longed for still and his tune is heard on the distant hill for the caged bird sings of freedom.

voice the only thing that is free: his freedom hopeful

The caged bird sings with a fearful trill of things unknown but longed for still and his tune is heard on the distant hill for the caged bird sings of freedom.

Same as stanza #3

1. trade winds, winds that blow almost continually on a course toward the equator.

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Symbol ~ Caged bird ~ person discriminated against by another - not caged by choice



free bird - person with no constraints

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alliteration - underlined once
assonance - underlined twice
figurative language - free bird
caged bird

"bars of rage" - the limits placed on them by others

"wings are clipped"
"feet are tied"

"dares to claim the sky" - the unlimited reaches a person has

theme: freedom from discrimination
hope

"Fable for When There's Now Way Out" "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" Symbolism and Theme Activity

May Swenson and Maya Angelou both use symbolism, an object that stand for or represents something other than itself, in their poems to create the image of a wrongly caged bird. In this activity, you are to write next to the bars what the symbol of the cage means in both poems. You are to write on the wings what the symbol of the bird means in both poems. You are to write outside the confines of the cage what the theme of each poem is to you. Remember that a theme is the main idea the writer expresses in his/her work.

