

“Still I Rise

BY MAYA ANGELOU

About the Author



*Maya Angelou (1928–2014) was an American poet, memoirist, and civil rights activist whose writing explores identity, resilience, justice, and the power of voice. Born Marguerite Annie Johnson in St. Louis, Missouri, Angelou spent much of her childhood in Arkansas, where experiences of racism, trauma, and silence later shaped the themes of her work. She became one of the most influential literary figures of the twentieth century, known for writing that blends personal narrative with broader reflections on history, culture, and human dignity. Angelou first gained international recognition with her 1969 memoir *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, which recounts her childhood and her journey toward reclaiming language after a period of self-imposed silence. The book helped redefine the modern memoir and remains widely taught for its exploration of race, gender, and personal agency. She went on to write several additional autobiographies, poetry collections, essays, and plays. Throughout her career, Angelou was deeply involved in the civil rights movement and worked with leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. Her writing often reflects the moral urgency of that historical moment while emphasizing empathy, courage, and the transformative potential of language. Angelou’s poetry reached a broad audience in 1993 when she recited “On the Pulse of Morning” at the inauguration of Bill Clinton, becoming the first poet to deliver an inaugural poem at a U.S. presidential inauguration since 1961. Her work has received numerous honors, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Today, Maya Angelou’s writing remains widely read for its clarity, emotional honesty, and belief that words can confront injustice, affirm human worth, and inspire social change.*

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.

10 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?

Does my haughtiness offend you?

20 Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,

You may cut me with your eyes,

You may kill me with your hatefulness,

But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?

Does it come as a surprise

30 That I dance like I've got diamonds

At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame

I rise

Up from a past that's rooted in pain

I rise

I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,

Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear

I rise

40 Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear

I rise

Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,

I am the dream and the hope of the slave.

I rise

I rise

I rise.