

Maya Angelou



Maya Angelou was an American poet, actress, memoirist, award winning author and a civil rights activist, born April 4, 1928 in St. Louis, Missouri. Her childhood was not easy, and she had to overcome many obstacles in her life, like divorced parents and being a single mother, which led her to become the successful person she was.

During her life she published 7 autobiographies, 5 essays, 167 poems, and 4 plays. She was best known for her memoir, *I Known Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), which was the first nonfiction bestseller by an African American woman. Angelou also wrote, directed, and acted in many plays, tv shows, and films. Her screenplay *Georgia* (1972) was the first original script by a black woman to be produced, and she also directed *Down in the Delta* (1998), which made her the first African American woman to direct a major motion picture. Angelou's writing set an example for many African American writers, especially women, who were marginalized and unable to present themselves as the central character. In the 1970s, *I Known Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) increased Black feminist writing, helping them write freely instead of being shamed. Angelou not only inspired writers, but also the modern hip-hop community. Artists like Tupac, Kanye West and Nicki Minaj have been inspired by her poetry.

Apart from being a writer, Maya Angelou was also an activist. Some of her most recognized works are her writings about the anticolonial struggle in Africa, her work with Malcom X in planning for an Organization of Afro-American Unity, and her influence on legislators on behalf of marriage equality. Throughout her life, Angelou received many awards including 3 Grammys, the Spingarn Medal, the National Medal of Arts, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, etc. Even

after her death, on May 28, 2014, Angelou's work is still used in education and opened doors for many African American writers.