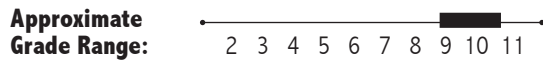


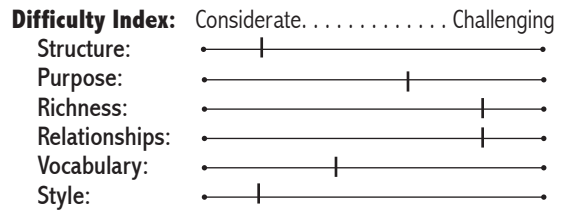
Teacher Guide for FAST-R Passage: “Sympathy” and “Caged Bird”

FAST-R: Formative Assessments of Student Thinking in Reading Poetry

At a Glance



Genre: Poetry
Topic: African-American poets of different generations write about freedom using the metaphor of a caged bird.
Author: Paul Laurence Dunbar and Maya Angelou
Source: *Oak and Ivy* and *Collected Poems of Maya Angelou*



Lexile Measure: 1420L

In the following two poems, “Sympathy” and “Caged Bird,” two different African-American writers from two different generations use the same image of a bird in a cage to communicate their thoughts on life and freedom.

Sympathy

1 I know what the caged bird feels, alas!
 When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;
 When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,
 And the river flows like a stream of glass;
 5 When the first bird sings and the first bud opes,
 And the faint perfume from its chalice steals--
 I know what the caged bird feels!

I know why the caged bird beats his wing
 Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;
 10 For he must fly back to his perch and cling
 When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;
 And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
 And they pulse again with a keener sting--
 I know why he beats his wing!

15 I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
 When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,--
 When he beats his bars and he would be free;
 It is not a carol of joy or glee,
 But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,
 20 But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings--
 I know why the caged bird sings!

Paul Laurence Dunbar

Relationships & Richness: These poems focus on the relationships of freedom and oppression, of an individual to an oppressive society (the bird to its cage), and of an artist to expression.

Recognizing that both poems are by African-American authors, understanding the poets' historical contexts, and linking to their own experiences will add to students' appreciation of the richness in these texts.

See especially: Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10

Style: “Sympathy” features repetition (or near-repetition) in the first and last lines of each stanza to emphasize the degree to which the speaker identifies with the caged bird.

See especially: Question 2

Vocabulary: “Sympathy,” written in 1899, features some older, more formal language that may be unfamiliar to students, particularly “chalice,” “fain,” and “keener.”

See especially: Question 3

Structure: The poem’s rhyme scheme (ABAABAA) emphasizes a pattern within each stanza, where the first line sets up a connection between the speaker and the caged bird, which is elaborated on in the next five lines and echoed in the final line.

Purpose: The final stanza suggests that Dunbar believed in expressing one’s aspirations, even when conditions make them seem unattainable. Based on information in the “author spotlight,” students may also infer that Dunbar valued language and poetry as a means of both artistic expression and protest against injustice.

See especially: Question 5

Continued on next page →

Caged Bird

1 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
so he opens his throat to sing.

15 The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
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 winds 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.

Maya Angelou

← **Vocabulary:** Angelou uses familiar, uncomplicated language throughout.

← **Style:** Angelou alludes to the image in Dunbar's work and says explicitly what Dunbar leaves implicit: "the caged bird sings of freedom."

Readers may infer that she, like Dunbar, believes in using language and artistic expression to protest injustice.

← **See especially:** Questions 8, 9, 10

← **Structure:** Angelou also uses repetition, repeating whole stanzas (3 and 6) and sets of lines (12-14, 29-30).

In a subtler pattern, each stanza ends with a bird expressing itself in some way ("claim the sky," "names the sky his own," "opens his throat to sing," "sings of freedom").

Ideas for Connected Writing Activities:

- Write an additional stanza for each poem, keeping the style, tone, and rhyme scheme consistent.

Humanities Connection:

- Research the lives of Dunbar and Angelou. Why could each writer relate to a caged bird? What might the image represent for each of them?

Author Spotlights

Paul Laurence Dunbar, who was born in Ohio in 1872, started his own newspaper by age 17. He faced racial prejudice and discrimination in the job market and was only able to find work as an elevator operator. Long hours spent moving the elevator up and down between floors gave Dunbar ample time to compose poetry, which he later published in 1893 in a book called *Oak and Ivy*. Dunbar died of tuberculosis at age 33.

Maya Angelou (1928-) is not only a successful writer but also an important figure to the Civil Rights Movement. She was close to both Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, and began writing in earnest after each was assassinated. Her memoir and most famous book, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, was published in 1970. From there, her fame as a writer grew enormously. At President Clinton's request, she composed a poem for his inauguration in 1993.

Teacher Guide for FAST-R Passage: “Sympathy” and “Caged Bird”

FAST-R: Formative Assessments of Student Thinking in Reading Poetry

The annotated answer key below highlights common reasons students might choose each answer, and the sidebar gives more insight into the questions, to help you understand patterns of student responses. Always make time to follow up with students in conferences to ensure that the patterns you diagnose are consistent with students’ reading and thinking strategies.

-
1. According to the speaker in “Sympathy,” how does the caged bird feel?
- A. bright, springing, perfumed (OOP2, stanza 1)
 - B. alarmed, persecuted, fearful (OOB)
 - ✓ C. constrained, oppressed, imprisoned
 - D. faint, clinging, ill (OOP2, stanza 2)
- M11: Determine implicit meaning from words in context*
-
2. Which of the following BEST explains the title “Sympathy”?
- A. The speaker pities the caged bird because of its injuries. (OOP1, lines 8-17)
 - ✓ B. The speaker also shares the caged bird’s desire for freedom.
 - C. The speaker is critical of the caged bird’s reasons for singing. (OOP2, lines 19-21)
 - D. The speaker admires the caged bird’s courage. (OOB)
- M11: Determine implicit meaning from words in context*
-
3. Which of the following BEST paraphrases lines 10-11?
- A. The bird stays in his cage because his injuries might cause him to faint. (OOP2, may have confused “fain”)
 - B. The bird stays on his perch because he is afraid of the wind. (OOP2)
 - C. The bird must return to the perch when he would rather be on a swing. (OOP1, understood “fain” but not “bough”)
 - ✓ D. The bird has to stay in the cage when he would rather be perched on a swinging tree branch.
- FE2: Recognize evidence explicitly stated at multiple locations or with varied wording in the text*
-
4. Lines 12-14 of “Sympathy” suggest that
- A. the bird is so crippled it will never be able to enjoy freedom. (OOP1)
 - ✓ B. the bird has not given up hope despite a lifetime of captivity.
 - C. the bird could enjoy its captivity if only it would stop fighting. (OOP2)
 - D. as the bird gets older, its desire for freedom increases. (OOP2)
- M11: Determine implicit meaning from words in context*
-
5. The poet compares the caged bird’s song to a
- A. lullaby. (OOB)
 - B. symphony. (OOB, but students may confuse with “sympathy”)
 - C. carol of joy. (OOP2)
 - ✓ D. prayer.
- FE2: Recognize evidence explicitly stated at multiple locations or with varied wording in the text*
-
6. In “Caged Bird,” how many stanzas are devoted to the experience of the caged bird?
- A. 1 (OOB)
 - B. 2 (OOP2, 2 stanzas are devoted to the free bird)
 - C. 3 (OOB)
 - ✓ D. 4
- FE2: Recognize evidence explicitly stated at multiple locations or with varied wording in the text*
-

Grades 9-10 • Poetry • “Sympathy” and “Caged Bird”

7. In this poem, Angelou is comparing and contrasting

- ✓ A. a free bird to a caged bird.
- B. a sympathetic bird to a songbird. (OOB)
- C. the bird in her poem with the bird in “Sympathy.” (OOP2)
- D. pet birds and birds in a zoo. (OOP2)

FE1: *Identify evidence explicitly stated in the text*

8. What is the most likely reason the poet chose this title for her poem?

- A. The poem is her critique of Dunbar’s “Sympathy.” (OOP2)
- B. Like Dunbar, she enjoys studying birds. (OOB)
- C. The poem is her way of explaining something that cannot be fully understood. (OOB)
- ✓ D. Like Dunbar, she writes to express her own desire for freedom.

MI3: *Determine implicit meaning by understanding the organization of information in the text*

9. The title of Maya Angelou’s poem refers to an image in Paul Laurence Dunbar’s poem. This is an example of

- A. a simile (OOB)
- B. irony (OOB)
- ✓ C. an allusion
- D. plagiarism (OOP2)

MI5: *Determine implicit meaning by incorporating an understanding of literary concepts*

10. Which of the following lines from “Caged Bird” most closely parallels the meaning of lines 12-13 of “Sympathy”?

- A. lines 1-2 (OOP2)
- ✓ B. lines 15-18
- C. lines 23-24 (OOP2)
- D. lines 35-38 (OOP1)

FE2: *Recognize the explicit meaning from varied wording in the text*

FAST-R

Formative Assessments of Student Thinking in Reading



Name _____ "Sympathy" and "The Caged Bird" • Poetry
Date _____ Teacher/Class _____

In the following two poems, "Sympathy" and "Caged Bird," two different African-American writers from two different generations use the same image of a bird in a cage to communicate their thoughts on life and freedom.

Sympathy

- 1 I know what the caged bird feels, alas!
When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;
When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,
And the river flows like a stream of glass;
5 When the first bird sings and the first bud opes,
And the faint perfume from its chalice steals—
I know what the caged bird feels!

- I know why the caged bird beats his wing
Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;
10 For he must fly back to his perch and cling
When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;
And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
And they pulse again with a keener sting—
I know why he beats his wing!

- 15 I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,—
When he beats his bars and he would be free;
It is not a carol of joy or glee,
But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,
20 But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings—
I know why the caged bird sings!

— Paul Laurence Dunbar (1899)

Author Spotlights

Paul Laurence Dunbar, who was born in Ohio in 1872, started his own newspaper by age 17. He faced racial prejudice and discrimination in the job market and was only able to find work as an elevator operator. Long hours spent moving the elevator up and down between floors gave Dunbar ample time to compose poetry in his head, which he published in 1893 in a book called *Oak and Ivy*. Dunbar died of tuberculosis at age 33.

Maya Angelou (1928-) is not only a successful writer but also an important figure to the Civil Rights Movement. She was close with both Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, and began writing in earnest after they were each assassinated. Her memoir and most famous book, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, was published in 1970. From there, her fame as a writer grew enormously. At President Clinton's request, she composed a poem for his inauguration in 1993.

Caged Bird

- 1 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
so he opens his throat to sing.

- 15 The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
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but longed for still
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- The free bird thinks of another breeze
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- But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
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- 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.

— Maya Angelou (1969)

FAST-R

Formative Assessments of Student Thinking in Reading



Name _____

“Sympathy” and “The Caged Bird” • Poetry

Date _____

Teacher/Class _____

Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice questions by filling in the circle for the best answer on your answer sheet.

“Sympathy” by Paul Lawrence Dunbar

1. According to the speaker in “Sympathy,” how does the caged bird feel?

- A. bright, springing, perfumed
- B. alarmed, persecuted, fearful
- C. constrained, oppressed, imprisoned
- D. faint, clinging, ill

2. Which of the following BEST explains the title “Sympathy”?

- A. The speaker pities the caged bird because of its injuries.
- B. The speaker also shares the caged bird’s desire for freedom.
- C. The speaker is critical of the caged bird’s reasons for singing.
- D. The speaker admires the caged bird’s courage.

3. Which of the following BEST paraphrases lines 10-11?

- A. The bird stays in his cage because his injuries might cause him to faint.
- B. The bird stays on his perch because he is afraid of the wind.
- C. The bird must return to the perch when he would rather be on a swing.
- D. The bird has to stay in the cage when he would rather be perched on a tree branch somewhere.

4. Lines 12-14 suggest that

- A. the bird is so crippled it will never be able to enjoy freedom.
- B. the bird has not given up hope despite a lifetime of captivity.
- C. the bird could enjoy its captivity if only it would stop fighting.
- D. as the bird gets older, its desire for freedom increases.

5. The poet compares the caged bird’s song to a

- A. lullaby.
- B. symphony.
- C. carol of joy.
- D. prayer.

Name

School

Date

Teacher/Class

“Caged Bird” by Maya Angelou

6. In “Caged Bird,” how many stanzas are devoted to the experience of the caged bird?

- A. 1
- B. 2
- C. 3
- D. 4

7. In this poem, Angelou is comparing and contrasting

- A. a free bird to a caged bird.
- B. a sympathetic bird to a songbird.
- C. the bird in her poem with the bird in “Sympathy.”
- D. pet birds and birds in a zoo.

8. What is the most likely reason the poet chose this title for her poem?

- A. The poem is her critique of Dunbar’s “Sympathy.”
- B. Like Dunbar, she enjoys studying birds.
- C. The poem is her way of explaining something that cannot be fully understood.
- D. Like Dunbar, she writes to express her own desire for freedom.

9. The title of Maya Angelou’s poem refers to an image in Paul Laurence Dunbar’s poem. This is an example of

- A. a simile
- B. irony
- C. an allusion
- D. plagiarism

10. Which of the following lines most closely parallels the meaning of lines 12-14 of “Sympathy”?

- A. lines 1-2
- B. lines 15-18
- C. lines 23-24
- D. lines 35-38

FAST-R Answer Sheet

Name _____ School _____

Date _____ Grade _____ Class _____

Passage Title _____ Teacher Name _____

Completely fill the circle for the correct answer.

Write your answer to the open response prompt in the lined space below if your teacher directs you to do so.

- 1. (A) (B) (C) (D)
- 2. (A) (B) (C) (D)
- 3. (A) (B) (C) (D)
- 4. (A) (B) (C) (D)
- 5. (A) (B) (C) (D)
- 6. (A) (B) (C) (D)
- 7. (A) (B) (C) (D)
- 8. (A) (B) (C) (D)
- 9. (A) (B) (C) (D)
- 10. (A) (B) (C) (D)

| | | | | |
|-----------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| OFFICE USE ONLY | | | | |
| RESEARCH: | (Y) | (N) | | |
| OPEN RESPONSE: | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |