

Study Guide for Final Exam
10th grade English
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

Chapter by chapter Study Guide Questions

Untitled prologue/memory:

1. Summarize the events of the first section of the book.
2. What do you think it means?

Chapter 1:

1. Explain the circumstances for Baily and Maya's journey to Stamps, Arkansas.
2. What is the significance of the Store in black Stamps? In Maya's life?
3. How did Momma start the store?
4. Describe the reality of cotton picking as portrayed by the men going to work and coming home.
5. How is this reality different from the stereotype?

Chapter 2:

1. Describe life for Uncle Willie.
2. What is Uncle Willie's role in the lives of the children?
3. What was strange about Willie's behavior when two strangers stop in the store?
4. How does Willie's behavior affect Maya?
5. With what does Maya fall in love with during this time in her life?

Chapter 3:

1. What news did Mr. Steward bring to the store?
2. What does Momma do to try and help Uncle Willie?
3. Describe that night in the store.

Chapter 4:

1. Compare and contrast Bailey and Maya. Include both physical and personality characteristics.
2. Describe the route from Black Stamps to White Stamps. What are the differences?

Chapter 5:

1. Compare and contrast the powhitetrash and the Johnson children.
2. Summarize the incident between Momma and the white trash girls.
3. Did Momma win the confrontation with the white trash girls? Why or why not?

Chapter 6:

1. Describe Reverend Thomas Howard.
2. Does the Reverend make a good ambassador of the church? Why or why not?
3. What makes Sister Monroe such an entertaining character?

Chapter 7:

1. What is Momma's philosophy about dealing with the white people of Stamps? How would you judge her philosophy?
2. Why was it strange that the Judge subpoenaed Momma as Mrs. Henderson?
3. What effect did this have for the white people involved? For the black community?

Chapter 8:

1. What is the significance of the first paragraph of the chapter?
2. Rephrase this quote into your own words, then write an explanation: "A light shade had been pulled down between the Black community and all things white, but one could see through it enough to develop a fear-admiration-contempt for the white "things"—white folks' cars and white glistening houses and their children and their women."
3. How did the Great Depression affect the Black community of Stamps?
4. Summarize the events of Christmas morning.
5. Make a judgment of the reaction of Bailey and Maya to their reception of gifts. Did they act appropriately? Why or why not?

Chapter 9:

1. Provide a detailed description of Big Bailey. How was he different from the other black men in Stamps?
2. How does Bailey react to his father's arrival?
3. How does Maya react to her father's arrival?
4. What did Maya think of St. Louis when they were entering the city?
5. How does Maya react to her mother?

Chapter 10:

4. Provide a detailed description of Grandmother Baxter. Compare her to Momma. How are they alike? How are they different?
5. Compare the men of St. Louis to the men of Stamps. How are they alike? How are they different?
6. What made education different in St. Louis than in Stamps?
7. How were Maya's St. Louis Uncles different from Uncle Willy? How were they similar?
8. "Ritie, don't worry 'cause you ain't pretty. Plenty pretty women I seen digging ditches or worse. You smart. I swear to God, I rather you have a good mind than a cute behind." Is what Uncle Tommy said a compliment? What do you think of this? How would you feel if someone said something similar to you? (Gentlemen, use your imagination to change the quote around to suit a man or imagine being a young woman.)
9. How was their housing with their mother different from their life in Stamps?
10. Explain Bailey's relationship with his mother.

Chapter 11:

4. In this chapter you meet Mr. Freeman (aside from the brief description in the previous chapter). Describe him. Feel free to be as honest as you like. Take into account the entire chapter.
5. What do you think of Maya's reactions to Mr. Freeman? Why did she act the way she did?

Chapter 12:

4. How would you describe having to read this chapter?
5. What do you think about Maya as the character experiencing the events? As the author writing this chapter?
6. Why do you think she included this chapter and in such detail?

Chapter 13:

6. Did Mr. Freeman get what he deserved? Was justice served?
7. What is Maya's rationale for her decision to not speak to anyone but Bailey?
8. Do you think Maya's logic (in deciding not to speak) is solid or not? Explain.
9. What was her family's reaction to her cessation of speech? What was the final outcome?

Chapter 14 (Maya and Bailey go back to Stamps)

1. How was the reaction of the people of different in Stamps than in St. Louis to Maya not speaking?
2. How did the people of Stamps react to the Johnson children in general? Why did they ask the questions they did?
3. When did Bailey do with the newfound attention? Why did he say "not trues"?
4. How did Maya react to the return to Stamps?

Chapter 15 (Maya starts her lessons in living)

1. Describe Mrs. Flowers in the following ways: 1) specific details from the story 2) in the your own words.
2. Why did Mrs. Flowers offer to have Maya over for tea cookies?
3. Why was the visit with Mrs. Flowers so important for Maya?
4. Was mama's reaction at the end of the chapter to Maya's phrase, "by the way," justifiable? What did you think?
5. What is your favorite quote from this chapter?

Chapter 16 (Maya gets a job)

1. What was Maya's boss like? Why do you think Maya's boss treated her the way she did?
2. What is Mr. Cullinan like? What details make him memorable to you?
3. Why did Ms. Cullinan call Maya, Mary? Why did she call Hallelujah, Glory?
4. Did it Maya break the dishes on accident? Why did she do it?
5. Why did Maya say "Mrs. Cullinan was right about one thing. My name wasn't Mary."

Chapter 17 (Bailey sees mother dear—Kay Francis)

1. What was daily life like in Stamps during the summer?
2. Why were Momma, Maya and Uncle Willie worried about Bailey when he did not come home on time?
3. What was different about Bailey's whipping than the last time when it happened at church?
4. What was the cause of Bailey's dejection?
5. Who is Kay Francis and why is she important to the children? Specifically: What does she mean to Bailey? To Maya?

Text that is italicized is a direct quote from the book. Analyze each quote. Explain what the quote means and how it fits into the chapter.

Chapter 18 (The church revival meeting)

1. *People whose history and future were threatened each day by extinction considered that it was only by divine intervention that they were able to live at all.*
2. *Would God the Father allow His only Son to mix with this crowd of cotton pickers and maids, washerwomen and handymen?*
3. *Charity don't go around saying 'I give you food and I give you clothes and by rights you ought to thank me.' The congregation knew whom he was talking about and voiced agreement with this analysis.*
4. *They basked in the righteousness of the port and the exclusiveness of the downtrodden. Let the white folks have their money and power and segregation and sarcasm and big houses and schools and lawns like carpets, and books and mostly—mostly—let them have their whiteness. It was better to be meek and lowly, spat upon and abused for this little time than to spend eternity frying on the fires of hell.*
5. *Reality began its tedious crawl back into their reasoning. After all, they were needy and hungry and despised and dispossessed and sinners the world over where in the driver seat. How long, merciful Father? How long?*

A stranger to the music could not have made a distinction between the songs sung a few minutes before and those being danced to in the gay house by the railroad tracks. All asked the same questions. How long, oh God? How long?

Chapter 19 (Joe Louis fight on the radio)

6. *My race groaned. It was our people falling. It was another lynching, yet another Black man hanging on a tree. One more woman ambushed and raped. A Black boy whipped and maimed. It was hounds on the trail of a man running through slimy swamps. It was a white woman slapping her mate for being forgetful.*
7. *If Joe and lost we were back in slavery and beyond help. It would all be true, the accusations that we were lower types of human beings. Only a little higher than the apes. True that we were stupid and ugly and lazy and dirty and unlucky, and worst of all, that God himself hated us and ordained us to be hewers of wood and drawers of water, forever and ever, world without end.*
8. *It wouldn't do for a Black man and his family to be caught on a lonely country road on a night when Joe Louis had proved that we were the strongest people in the world.*
9. Explain the hypocrisy of the 1930's in regard to black athletes and performers.

Chapter 20 (Fish fry and Louise)

1. Why did Maya not feel like she belonged at the fish fry with everyone else?
2. Describe Louise Kendricks.
3. What was the purpose of the game Maya and Louise played in the clearing? Why did it mean so much to Maya?
4. *"...after being a woman for three years I was about to become a girl."*
5. What does Maya's reaction to the advances of Tommy Valdón show us about her?

Chapter 21 (Bailey meets Joyce)

1. Describe Joyce.
2. Even though Bailey had professed to know what to do inside the tent when playing “house”, his reaction to Joyce’s knowledge showed otherwise. What did Maya think would happen if Joyce had sex with Bailey? Why?
3. What was Joyce liked around the store before she started having sex with Bailey? What was she like after? Why did she act differently?
4. How did Bailey change after he began his relationship with Joyce?
5. *I think she was Bailey’s first love outside the family. For him, she was the mother who let him get as close as he dreamed, the sister who wasn’t moody and withdrawing, and teary and tender-hearted.*
6. What was Bailey’s reaction to Joyce’s absence? What was the cause of Joyce’s absence?
7. What was the purpose of Joyce in Bailey’s life? In other words, what do you think Bailey learned from his relationship with Joyce?

Chapter 22

1. What were Marguerite’s feelings about Florida Taylor’s funeral?
2. How does the weather heighten the atmosphere for the story told by Mr. Taylor?
3. What was the purpose of the author including this chapter?

Chapter 23

1. On graduation night, what is the first clue that the ceremony will be a disappointment?
2. Why is Marguerite so upset by Edward Donleavy’s speech? What would she have preferred for him to talk about?
3. How does this speech further comment on the hypocrisy of whites regarding black athletes?
4. The graduation provides a portrait of the inequities in segregated schools. Explain how the speaker's remarks demonstrate these inequities.
5. How did Henry Reed bring a feeling of redemption to the graduates and the members of the audience?
6. What is the significance of the children singing "Negro National Anthem" by James Weldon Johnson in Ch. 23?
7. Why does the author call the entire human species “an abomination” (page 181 or 153)?

Chapter 24

1. If you could talk to Dr. Lincoln, what would you say?
2. Why did Momma think the white doctor would treat Maya?
3. How does Marguerite’s imagined version of Momma’s conversation with the dentist differ from what actually happened?
4. Do you think Momma was justified in her actions toward Dr. Lincoln?

Chapter 25

1. What incident prompts Momma to get the children out of Stamps? Do you think she made the right decision?
2. What was the most disturbing aspect of the incident?
3. Considering what you know about Momma and the children’s mother, Vivian Baxter, how do you think the two women got along?

4. Do you imagine Momma was relieved to get back to Stamps-or did she wish she could stay in California?

Chapter 26

1. When Mother wakes up the children at 2:30am, what does this show about her personality?
2. Does Mother seem different in California than in St. Louis? Explain.
3. What does Mother do when her male business partner curses her?

Chapters 27 & 28

1. Why did San Francisco change so much at the beginning of World War II. Why do you think the Blacks were so willing to profit from the displacement of the Japanese?
2. Compare Marguerite's experiences at the neighborhood girls' school, at George Washington High School, and at the California Labor School.
3. Who was Miss Kirwin? Was she a good teacher? Did she treat students fairly?
4. Why is Miss Kirwin such an important teacher for Maya? What do you think she is really teaching her?

Chapter 29

1. Why is Daddy Clidell important to Marguerite?
2. The Black con-men in Chapter 29 feel that anything they take from the white man is their just due. Do you agree with that philosophy?
3. How are Marguerite and her classmates "bi-lingual"?

Chapter 30

1. Describe Dolores.
2. What excuse does Daddy Bailey make for his frequent trips to Mexico?
3. What are the real reasons for the trips to Mexico?
4. Why is Marguerite so pleased when her father invites her to go to Mexico with him?
5. Explain what is meant by, "How maddening it was to have been born in a cotton field with aspirations of grandeur"(page 197)
6. Why does Marguerite end up driving the car?

Chapter 31

1. What happens between Maya and Dolores?
2. How does her father react to this event?
3. Does the conflict between Dolores and Marguerite become resolved in a satisfactory way? Do their problems remind you of any you have experienced or know about?
4. Why doesn't Marguerite simply go back to her mother's?

Chapters 32

1. What does Marguerite gain from living in the junkyard?
2. Does it seem strange that no one seems to wonder where Marguerite was for a month? What would be the reaction of most fathers if their daughter disappeared?

Chapter 33

1. Why does Bailey decide to move out? Is Mother supportive of his decision? Is Marguerite?

Chapter 34

1. How is Marguerite treated when she goes to the Market Street Railway Company to apply for a job?
2. Why do you think she kept going back?
3. What is meant by, “I had gone from being ignorant of being ignorant to being aware of being aware”?
4. Reread the last two paragraphs of chapter 34. Is the plight of Black females still the same today—or have things changed?
5. Compare the last two paragraphs to the struggles that young women face growing up in Paraguay. Are there any similarities? Explain.

Chapter 35

1. Why is Marguerite, at 16, worried about her sexual orientation? Is this a question which occurs to most teenagers?
2. What prompts Marguerite to invite one of the handsome brothers to be intimate with her? What is the result?

Chapter 36

1. Why does Marguerite wait so long to tell her mother about the pregnancy?
2. How do Vivian Baxter and Daddy Clidell react to Marguerite’s news?
3. What feelings does Marguerite have when her son is born?
4. React to: “If you are for the right thing, then you do it without thinking.” Would you consider this good advice for living?

Possible Essay Topics for the Final Exam:

- How does the title of the book, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, fit the story? What does it mean?
- What is the major theme of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*?
- Explain, in detail, the hypocrisy of society regarding black performers and athletes.
- What role does religion play in the lives of the inhabitants of Stamps and Momma?
- How is *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* a coming of age story? At what point does Maya come of age?