

Graduation Maya Angelou Analysis

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Graduation by Maya Angelou Analysis

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In graduation by Maya Angelou, She and her class were graduating in a time when people did not want to see them graduate. This story took place in the 1940s and at that time black people were not seen the same as everyone else. Other races looked down upon them which made their graduation feel even more deserving of it. Angelou and her class were looked down on and discriminated during their graduation. This essay by Angelou takes place in the 1940s which was a horrible time for black people. At this time black people were not accepted into any professional sports teams and they were not accepted in society. The MLB didn't allow black people to play until 1940, and the NBA did not let black people play until the 1950s. Racist groups like the KKK were still at large threatening death on black people. Jim Crow laws were also enforced which made it even harder for black people to vote. The laws included poll taxes, literacy tests, and the grandfather clause. Poll taxes are self-explanatory everyone had to pay to vote. This rule was made knowing most black people could not afford to pay the taxes. Literacy tests were meant to stop black people from voting. The test is filled with trick questions and if you get one answer wrong you automatically fail. The grandfather clause was a rule that if your grandfather has voted you don't have to pay the poll tax or take the test. Because of the time period, most black people did not have a grandfather who has taken the test before them. Keeping all of this in mind Angelou and her class was still able to graduate although society did not think much of black people and did not want it to happen. Donleavy said, "If my brother wanted to become a lawyer he had to first pay penance for his skin by picking cotton and hoeing corn and studying correspondence books at night for twenty years"(51). Donleavy did not care how those words sounded and he did not care how everyone would feel about it. He is an example of how white people were back then. Angelou already knew herself that it was awful to be black at that time. "It was awful to be a negro and have no control over my life," says Angelou(52). Angelou did not like that they couldn't defend themselves just because of the color of their skin. Angelou states "It was brutal to be a young and already trained to sit quietly and listen to charges brought against my color with no chance of defense"(52). There is even a point when Angelou starts to think that they should be dead. What kind of life is being discriminated against and looked down just for the skin you were born with. Most people would agree that being judged because of something you were born with is wrong, so imagine the life black people who had to live through all of that. Angelou is definitely not the first person to start thinking of death after being treated like this....

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Graduation Maya Angelou Analysis delves into the profound themes and emotional depth of Angelou's autobiographical essay "Graduation." In this work, she captures the complexities of her youth as an African American girl in the segregated South, illustrating how a single event can encapsulate the broader struggles of race, identity, and personal growth. This analysis will explore the key themes, stylistic elements, and the significance of Angelou's narrative, providing insights into her experiences and the lessons that resonate universally.

Understanding the Context of "Graduation"

Maya Angelou's "Graduation" is part of her first autobiographical work, "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," published in 1969. The essay recounts her eighth-grade graduation ceremony in Stamps, Arkansas, against the backdrop of racial segregation and societal expectations. Understanding the historical and cultural context is crucial for appreciating the depth of Angelou's narrative.

The Historical Background

- Segregation and Racism: The 1940s and 1950s in the United States were marked by systemic racism, particularly in the South, where African Americans faced significant discrimination in education, employment, and everyday life.
- Importance of Education: For many African American families, education was viewed as a pathway to freedom and success, making graduation a pivotal milestone.

Thematic Elements in "Graduation"

Angelou's narrative is rich with themes that reflect both her personal journey and the collective experiences of her community.

Identity and Self-Discovery

The theme of identity is at the forefront of Angelou's essay. As she prepares for her graduation, she grapples with her self-worth in a society that often devalues her existence.

- Struggle for Acceptance: Angelou's recounting of her experiences highlights her desire to be recognized as an individual deserving of respect and dignity.
- Pride in Heritage: Despite the challenges, there is a strong sense of pride in her African American identity, which she embraces throughout the narrative.

The Impact of Racism

Racism plays a significant role in shaping Angelou's experience during her graduation. The moment is marred by the harsh reality of societal prejudice, which serves as a reminder of the barriers she faces.

- The Speech Incident: The climax of the essay occurs when a white speaker diminishes the accomplishments of the graduating class, highlighting the insidious nature of racism. This moment becomes a turning point for Angelou and her peers, leading to feelings of anger and disillusionment.
- Resilience in Adversity: Angelou's response to the speaker's remarks emphasizes the resilience of the African American community, showcasing their ability to rise above oppression.

Literary Devices and Stylistic Choices

Maya Angelou's writing is notable for its vivid imagery, emotional depth, and powerful language. Her use of literary devices enhances the overall impact of "Graduation."

Imagery and Symbolism

- Color and Nature: Angelou employs rich imagery to paint the emotional landscape of her youth. For instance, she describes the beauty of the graduation ceremony, contrasting it with the harsh realities of her life.
- Symbols of Hope: The graduation cap and gown symbolize hope and achievement, representing not just personal success but the collective aspirations of her community.

Emotional Tone

The tone of the essay shifts throughout, reflecting Angelou's emotional journey.

- Joy and Anticipation: Initially, there is a sense of joy as Angelou and her classmates prepare for graduation, filled with dreams for the future.
- Disillusionment and Anger: The speech by the white speaker evokes feelings of disillusionment, leading to a powerful moment of reflection on the realities of racism.

The Significance of "Graduation" in Angelou's Life

"Graduation" serves as a pivotal moment in Angelou's life, marking not only a transition from childhood to adolescence but also a deepening awareness of her identity and the world around her.

Personal Growth

- Transformation: The experience catalyzes Angelou's growth, reinforcing her determination to overcome obstacles and pursue her dreams.
- Empowerment: By sharing her story, Angelou empowers others in the African American community to recognize their worth and fight against injustice.

Legacy and Influence

- Cultural Impact: "Graduation" resonates with readers from all walks of life, transcending its specific historical context to address universal themes of resilience and self-identity.
- Inspiration for Future Generations: Angelou's narrative serves as an inspiration for future generations to embrace their identities and strive for excellence despite adversity.

Conclusion: The Lasting Impact of Angelou's "Graduation"

In conclusion, a thorough analysis of "Graduation" reveals Maya Angelou's profound insights into identity, racism, and personal growth. Her narrative not only reflects her journey but also embodies the struggles and triumphs of countless individuals facing similar challenges. As readers engage with Angelou's work, they are reminded of the importance of resilience, pride, and the pursuit of education as a means to empower oneself and uplift the community. Through her powerful storytelling, Angelou continues to inspire and educate, leaving an indelible mark on literature and society.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the main themes explored in Maya Angelou's 'Graduation'?

The main themes in 'Graduation' include racism, identity, resilience, and the transition from childhood to adulthood. Angelou captures the challenges faced by African Americans and the importance of education in overcoming societal barriers.

How does Maya Angelou use symbolism in 'Graduation'?

Angelou employs symbolism through the graduation ceremony itself, representing hope and achievement. Additionally, the white dress she wears symbolizes purity and the societal expectations placed on young African American women.

What role does the setting play in 'Graduation'?

The setting, a segregated school in the American South, highlights the racial tensions of the era. It serves as a backdrop for Angelou's experiences and emphasizes the struggles and triumphs of African Americans in a divided society.

How does Angelou's personal experience influence her writing in 'Graduation'?

Angelou's personal experiences as a young African American girl inform her narrative, providing authenticity and depth. Her reflections on the impact of racism and the importance of perseverance resonate with readers and enhance the emotional weight of her story.

What is the significance of the character Mrs. Flowers in 'Graduation'?

Mrs. Flowers serves as a mentor and role model for Angelou, representing the power of education and the importance of self-expression. She encourages Angelou to embrace her voice, which is a pivotal moment in the author's journey toward self-acceptance.

How does Angelou convey the impact of racism in 'Graduation'?

Angelou conveys the impact of racism through her personal anecdotes, illustrating the humiliation

and obstacles she faced during her graduation. Her experiences reflect broader societal issues and highlight the resilience required to overcome such challenges.

What literary devices does Angelou use in 'Graduation' to enhance her narrative?

Angelou employs various literary devices, including vivid imagery, metaphor, and foreshadowing. These devices enrich her storytelling, allowing readers to visualize her experiences and feel the emotional turmoil of her journey.

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