

Maya Angelou Graduation 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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Maya Angelou graduation analysis delves into the profound impact of Angelou's work, particularly her graduation speeches, which are often rich with themes of resilience, empowerment, and the human experience. Angelou, a celebrated poet, memoirist, and civil rights activist, had a unique ability to inspire and motivate her audience through her powerful words. This article will explore the significance of her graduation addresses, the key themes she emphasized, and the lessons we can glean from her eloquent delivery.

Understanding Maya Angelou's Influence

Maya Angelou's influence extends beyond her literary accomplishments; she played a crucial role in the civil rights movement and was a beacon of hope for many. Her voice resonated deeply, especially in moments of transition, such as graduations.

The Role of Graduation Speeches

Graduation ceremonies mark a significant transition in life, often characterized by hope, optimism, and uncertainty about the future. Angelou's speeches during these moments were not only intended to celebrate achievement but also to provide guidance for the journey ahead.

- Purpose of Graduation Speeches:

1. To encourage and motivate graduates.
2. To reflect on past experiences and lessons learned.
3. To offer wisdom for future challenges.
4. To celebrate community and shared experiences.

Key Themes in Angelou's Graduation Speeches

Throughout her graduation speeches, Angelou masterfully wove several recurring themes that resonate with audiences of all ages.

Resilience and Overcoming Adversity

One of the most prominent themes in Angelou's addresses is the idea of resilience. She often spoke about her own experiences of hardship and how they shaped her into the person she became.

- Key Points on Resilience:

- Life is filled with challenges, but overcoming them is essential for personal growth.
- Adversity can serve as a catalyst for change and self-discovery.
- Emphasizing the importance of perseverance in the face of difficulties.

Angelou frequently drew from her own life experiences, including her childhood trauma and struggles as a black woman in America. She conveyed that these experiences, while painful, were instrumental in developing her strength and character.

Self-Identity and Acceptance

Another vital theme in Angelou's speeches is the importance of self-identity and acceptance. She urged graduates to embrace who they are and to recognize the value of their unique stories.

- Key Points on Self-Identity:

- Understanding and honoring one's roots can empower individuals.
- Celebrating diversity and individuality enriches communities.
- Encouragement to take pride in one's accomplishments and heritage.

Angelou's own journey of self-acceptance was a powerful testament to the importance of knowing oneself and finding strength in one's identity, particularly in a world that often seeks to marginalize those who are different.

Empowerment and Social Responsibility

Maya Angelou was a fierce advocate for social justice and equality. Her speeches often emphasized the responsibility of individuals to use their voices for change and uplift others.

- Key Points on Empowerment:
- Each individual has the power to effect change in their community.
- Encouraging graduates to stand up for justice and equality.
- The importance of mentorship and helping those who are less fortunate.

In her graduation speeches, Angelou inspired graduates to recognize their potential and to understand that they are not just beneficiaries of education but also stewards of the knowledge and privilege they have gained.

Analysis of Specific Graduation Speeches

Maya Angelou delivered numerous graduation addresses throughout her life. Each speech reflected her unique style and the timeless wisdom she imparted. Here, we will analyze some of her most notable speeches.

Winston-Salem State University (1982)

In her speech at Winston-Salem State University, Angelou focused on the importance of courage and creativity. She encouraged graduates to pursue their dreams and to never shy away from their true passions.

- Key Highlights:
- Angelou shared personal anecdotes that illustrated her journey.
- She emphasized the necessity of having the courage to follow one's heart.
- The speech culminated in a call to action, urging graduates to remain creative and innovative in their endeavors.

Smith College (1990)

At Smith College, Angelou addressed the significance of community and the interconnectedness of humanity. Her speech underscored that while individual achievement is commendable, it is the collective effort that leads to progress.

- Key Highlights:
- She spoke about the importance of mentorship and support systems.
- Angelou highlighted historical figures who made sacrifices for the greater good.
- The speech urged graduates to remember that they are part of something larger than themselves.

University of California, Berkeley (2002)

During her address at UC Berkeley, Angelou touched on themes of hope and the future. She inspired graduates to approach the world with optimism, despite the challenges they might face.

- Key Highlights:
- Angelou reflected on the trials of the past and the hope for the future.
- She reaffirmed the idea that education is a powerful tool for change.
- The speech concluded with a message of unity and the importance of working together.

Lessons Learned from Angelou's Graduation Speeches

Maya Angelou's graduation speeches impart valuable lessons that extend beyond the ceremony itself. Here are some key takeaways:

- Embrace Challenges: Life will inevitably present obstacles, but facing them head-on can lead to profound personal growth.
- Honor Your Story: Understanding and accepting your unique experiences can empower you and others.
- Be a Change Agent: Use your voice and position to advocate for justice and equality in your community.
- Foster Community: Support and uplift those around you; collective strength can lead to transformative change.
- Stay Hopeful: Approach the future with optimism and determination, knowing that your actions can make a difference.

Conclusion

Maya Angelou's graduation speeches are not just a celebration of academic achievement; they are profound reflections on life, identity, and the responsibility of individuals to effect change. Through her eloquence and deep understanding of the human experience, Angelou has left an indelible mark on countless lives. Her calls for resilience, self-acceptance, empowerment, and social responsibility continue to resonate, reminding us all of the power of words and the importance of using them wisely. As graduates embark on their journeys, the wisdom imparted by Angelou serves as a guiding light, inspiring them to not only achieve their dreams but to uplift others along the way.

Frequently Asked Questions

What themes are present in Maya Angelou's graduation speech?

Key themes in Maya Angelou's graduation speech include resilience, empowerment, the importance of education, and the need for self-identity and dignity.

How does Maya Angelou address the challenges faced by graduates?

Angelou acknowledges the various obstacles that graduates may encounter, emphasizing that overcoming these challenges is essential for personal growth and success.

What rhetorical devices does Maya Angelou use in her graduation speech?

Angelou employs various rhetorical devices such as anecdotes, metaphors, and repetition to engage her audience and convey her messages effectively.

What impact did Maya Angelou's graduation speech have on its audience?

The speech inspired graduates to embrace their potential, instilling a sense of hope and motivation to pursue their dreams despite adversity.

How does Maya Angelou's personal background influence her graduation speech?

Angelou's experiences with racism, trauma, and resilience inform her perspective, allowing her to connect deeply with her audience and offer relatable wisdom.

What role does the concept of 'voice' play in Angelou's graduation analysis?

The concept of 'voice' is central to Angelou's message, as she encourages graduates to find and use their own voices to advocate for themselves and others.

In what ways does Angelou's speech reflect her broader body of work?

The speech reflects Angelou's broader themes of social justice, empowerment, and personal transformation, linking her literary work with her advocacy for human rights.

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