



Beyond ‘The Caged Bird Sings’ Performance Guide

“While one may encounter many defeats, one must not be defeated.” DCDC presents a moving tribute to the legacy of Maya Angelou, the iconic author, poet, civil rights activist, and humanitarian. Students will gain insight into the life of this extraordinary woman beyond her writings while also learning about her literary impact on American society.

This performance guide includes:

- Artist bios
- A warmup activity and discussion prompt
- Background information
- Key vocabulary
- Suggested Q & A questions
- Post-show discussion questions
- A compare/contrast writing exercise
- Related Ohio Learning Standards
- A list of poems, music, and sound bites sampled in the performance

BEFORE THE SHOW

Meet the Artists

Dayton Contemporary Dance Company was founded in 1968 to create performance opportunities for dancers of color. Five decades later, the 10th largest modern contemporary dance company in the nation remains rooted in the African American experience and committed to the development of diverse movement artists on the global stage.



DCDC₂ is an elite cohort of early career performing dance artists comprised of recent graduate and undergraduate dance students, created to engage a new generation of performing artists and prepare them for success in a new and exciting arts ecosystem. DCDC₂ engages school communities in dance performances every year.

Shonna Hickman-Matlock, Director of

DCDC₂ has taught, performed, and choreographed modern dance works, plus developed education and outreach programs for three-and-a-half decades.

2023-2024 Dance Artists: Kristen Allen, McKelynn Barber, Chelsea Bogue, Emily Bryan, Maiya Caldwell, Carly Hanson, Fara Ling, Malia Mabry, Hannah McGuffey, Victoria Stachelrodt, Jadayvius Story, Mandi Weitz

Meet the Choreographers



Lex Diggs
Independent Artist & Choreographer



Alexandria Flewellen
DCDC Dance & Teaching Artist



Shonna Hickman Matlock
DCDC₂ Director & Arts Enrichment Program Director / Dance Artist



Countess V. Winfrey
DCDC Rehearsal Director & Dance Artist

Find DCDC at www.dcdc.org and on Instagram [@daytoncontemporarydancecompany](https://www.instagram.com/daytoncontemporarydancecompany)

Classroom Warmup

Literal vs. Abstract Expression in Dance

Whole group: Review the vocabulary on page 3 of this guide.

On your own: Watch Video #1 (<https://youtu.be/ClYcEuFEhJY?si=CEnZzLdirW9IX9GR>) to learn about elements that choreographers use to turn literal gestures into abstract movements: speed, body part, size, position in space, and energy quality.

Watch Video #2 (https://youtu.be/wYsgZAy8M_g?si=mm8xJ6aDiYFZqGu4). Describe how this dance artist uses the elements to choreograph a literal dance and then an abstract dance about folding clothes.

Partners: Together, choose an everyday activity and create a literal gesture or gestures to represent it. Have your partner use one or more dance elements to change those gestures into an abstract interpretation of the same activity. If there's time, add music!

Whole group: Share your creation with your class. Can your classmates guess the everyday activity that you chose?

Think While You Watch

DCDC₂'s performance incorporates sound as well as movement. As you view the choreographed material, listen carefully to the narration, sound bites and music selections. Are the movements literal or abstract interpretations of Angelou's words?

Vocabulary

The following concepts and terms are helpful to understanding DCDC's performance.

- **Contemporary dance:** Art whose working material is the movement of humans. Dancers make use of varied dance techniques. Dances are produced in conventional and non-conventional stages and frequently incorporate audio/visual elements such as spoken word, visual art, lighting, architecture, circus, music, etc.
- **Choreography:** The sequence of steps and movements in dance.
- **Choreographer:** The artist who creates with the movement of humans as material.
- **Gesture:** A movement of the body or limb that expresses or emphasizes an idea, feeling or attitude.
- **Literal vs. abstract expression:** Literal expression involves obvious gestures, while abstract expression involves movements that merely suggest the idea or feeling. Literal dances may have obvious characters, costumes and storylines. Abstract dances allow the audience to form their own interpretation of what they are seeing on stage.

Meet Marguerite Annie Johnson, or Maya Angelou

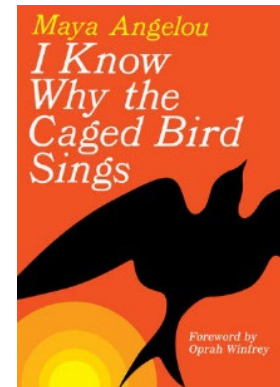


Maya Angelou in 1969
(photo by Chester Higgins, Jr.)

An acclaimed American poet, storyteller, activist, and autobiographer, Maya Angelou was born Marguerite Johnson in St. Louis, Missouri. Angelou had a broad career as a singer, dancer, actor, composer, and Hollywood's first female Black director, but became most famous as a writer, editor, essayist, playwright, and poet. As a civil rights activist, Angelou worked for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. She was also an educator and served as the Reynolds professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University. In 2000, Angelou was awarded the National Medal of Arts by President Bill Clinton. In 2010, she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in the U.S., by President Barack Obama. Angelou was awarded over 50 honorary degrees before her death in 2014.

Angelou's most famous work, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) is widely taught in schools, though it has faced controversy over its portrayal of race, sexual abuse, and violence. Angelou's use of fiction-writing techniques like dialogue and plot in her autobiographies was innovative for its time and helped, in part, to complicate the genre's relationship with truth and memory.

Excerpted from www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/maya-angelou



The Q & A

Artists love to answer thoughtful questions! If you are having trouble thinking of a question, here are some that are sure to be well-received.

- What drew you to this art form?
- Who are you inspired by?
- What kind of training/education did you complete?
- What's your favorite (or least favorite) part about your work? Why?
- What advice would you have for someone wanting to follow in your footsteps?

Compose Your Question

AFTER THE SHOW

Post-Show Discussion

Discuss or write a reflection:

Review the “Think While You Watch” prompt. Were the choreographed movements literal or abstract interpretations of Angelou’s writings?

Follow-up Questions

- What parts of the performance stood out for you and why?
- Did the dance artists effectively interpret Maya Angelou’s work? Why or why not?
- How did Maya Angelou’s writings influence society and culture?
- How would you use writing and movement to represent a theme?

Student Survey

Share your opinion about the performance with Muse Machine at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/P5PZHN7>

Writing Extension: Maya Angelou’s Poetic Heritage

Maya Angelou was inspired by the evocative words and imagery of Dayton poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, who wrote more than 80 years before her time. Angelou’s poem “Caged Bird” shares a theme with Dunbar’s poem “Sympathy” but differs in key ways. Read and/or listen to both poems and answer the following questions about each of them. Then write a short essay comparing and contrasting the two poems.

“Caged Bird” by Maya Angelou <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPUcY58mH64>

Original Text: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48989/caged-bird>

“Sympathy” by Paul Laurence Dunbar <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nz4lhMIhtrs>

Original Text: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46459/sympathy-56d22658afbc0>

- Who is the speaker?
- What is the occasion (the time and place of the piece, or historical context)?
- Who is the author’s intended audience?
- What is the author’s purpose?
- What is the subject?
- What is the tone or author’s attitude about the subject of the text? What words or phrases help you to identify it?

FOR TEACHERS

Related Ohio Learning Standards

The following standards are linked to the artist’s performance and/or the activities in the performance guide. Teachers may be able to make additional connections.

Dance

<i>Enduring Understandings: Critical and Creative Thinking, Literacy</i>	
Perceiving/Knowing/Creating	
6.2PE	Deepen personal awareness of the expressive body as it moves and feels in relation to the dance elements.
6-8.4PE	Explore the body’s range of movement possibilities.
6.6PE	Recognize how thoughts and ideas influence dance.
8.1PE	Attend to, consider and articulate the aesthetic qualities in dances observed.
HS Beg.6PE	Articulate points of view about dance and respond thoughtfully to the viewpoints of others.
HS Int.1PE	Explain the connections between dance, other arts areas and disciplines outside the arts.
HS Adv.6PE	Appreciate how the imagination inspires personal and diverse approaches to the choreographic process.
Producing/Performing	
6.5PR	Demonstrate how to dance with a supporting partner or group.
7.4PR	Create dance movement studies with clear intent and attention to dance elements, features and choreographic principles.
Responding/Reflecting	
7.5RE	Critique a dance based on how effectively the formal, technical and expressive aspects communicate a theme or idea.
HS Int.2RE	Critique a dance based on fundamental dance concepts.
HS Int.7RE	Develop and refine beliefs and questions about dance experiences.

Social Studies

American History	<i>Topic:</i> Social Transformations in The United States (1945-1994) <i>Content Statement # 27:</i> Following World War II, the United States experienced a struggle for racial and gender equality and the extension of civil rights.
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Writing

CCR Anchor Standard 4	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
CCR Anchor Standard 10	Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Speaking and Listening

CCR Anchor Standard 1	Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
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Works Sampled in DCDC's *Beyond 'The Caged Bird Sings'* In-School Performance

Poems by Maya Angelou

- ❖ “Harlem Hopscotch” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OIQHwvtsWQM>
- ❖ “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” - Black Is Eternal 2021 Performed by @Kerrinton_ . <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPUcY58mH64>
- ❖ “My Guilt” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hVl3TiLhWCs> (timestamp | 3:38-14:43)
- ❖ “Phenomenal Woman” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=egrQH2UTaWE>
- ❖ “Still I Rise” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RrjNdYdbiwk>
- ❖ “The Mask” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNCVw0Tmjil>

Music

- ❖ “Imprint/Maya” by David Rozenblatt set to the words of Angelou’s poem “My Guilt”
- ❖ “Phenomenal Woman” Album “Ruthie Foster – The Phenomenal Ruthie Foster” Blue Corn Music – BCM 0602 (2007)
- ❖ “Harlem Hopscotch” Album “Caged Bird Songs” © 2014 Smooch Music, Released on: 2014-11-04, Composer: Shawn Rivera
- ❖ “Run Joe” Maya Angelou – Miss Calypso Studio album by Maya Angelou (1957)
- ❖ “Still I Rise” by Maya Angelou – Creating Common Ground #SkollWF (2017)

Sound Bites

- ❖ The Lesson Dr. Maya Angelou Is Still Studying in Her 80s | Oprah's Master Class | OWN <https://youtu.be/N8RA4JsoKjY?si=xUFC4aqfOlugMnaj&t=49>
- ❖ Maya Angelou Documentary | Shannon E. Higgins <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WlzxO9JzYMA>
- ❖ Maya Angelou's Life, Legacy and Language | The Wall Street Journal <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PDamqgSacTQ&t=83s>
- ❖ AMERICAN MASTERS | Maya Angelou: And Still I Rise Trailer | PBS <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oX02lRsrtYg>
- ❖ The Revelation That Changed Dr. Maya Angelou's Life | Life Stories by Goalcast <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WDlw6u8FaZ4>

- ❖ Clip from Introducing Miss Calypso featured on the Oprah Winfrey Show
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guvUxyRyOfo>
- ❖ See Maya Angelou's early Calypso performances in the Bay Area | American Masters PBS <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QjtujvnZB9g>
- ❖ Listen to Dr. Maya Angelou's take on the creative process behind writing | American Masters PBS <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YOrSs4ExwG0>
- ❖ #Shorts What Being a Mute for almost 5 Years taught Maya Angelou | @writermangelou | 514 https://www.youtube.com/shorts/_MAq2jCarxs
- ❖ "STILL I RISE!" - Maya Angelou #quotesmotivatememe | @quotesmotivatememe <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/aSGm8i8H5Fw>
- ❖ "Phenomenal Woman" Maya Angelou, Live & Unplugged | @writerMangelou <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SqimgirMS0>
- ❖ #Shorts "Harlem Hopscotch" backstory of poem by Maya Angelou | @writermangelou | 514 <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/fuPIo5FFilg>