

## Summary- "I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings"

### Summary: Untitled Prologue

*If growing up is painful for the Southern Black girl, being aware of her displacement is the rust on the razor that threatens the throat.*

A young black girl named Maya stands in front of her church congregation on Easter, unable to finish reciting a poem. She wears an unflattering altered taffeta dress that, she notes, is probably a secondhand dress from a white woman, and she fantasizes that one day she will wake up out of her "black ugly dream" and be white and blond instead of a large, unattractive African American girl. After being humiliated in front of everyone and tripped by another child, she ends up running out of church peeing, crying, and laughing all at the same time.

### Summary: Chapter 1

Prior to this incident, when Maya is three years old and her brother, Bailey, is four, their parents divorce. Their parents send the children by train with a porter from California to Stamps, Arkansas, to live with their paternal grandmother, Annie Henderson, and her disabled adult son, Willie. The porter abandons the children the next day in Arizona, and the two young children make the rest of the trip to Stamps with pieces of paper tacked on their bodies listing their final destination. Mrs. Henderson, whom the children soon begin to call Momma, owns and runs the only store in the black section of Stamps. The Store is the center of the community, and Momma is one of the community's most respected residents.

During the cotton-harvesting season, Momma awakes at four in the morning to sell lunches to the crowd of black cotton laborers before they begin the day's grueling work. In the morning, the laborers appear full of hope and energy, but by the end of the day, they barely have enough energy to drag themselves home. They always earn less than they thought they would, and they often voice suspicions about illegally weighted scales. The stereotype of happy, singing cotton pickers enrages Maya. The laborers never earn enough to pay their debts, much less enough to save a penny.