**Read the poem.**

1. Circle unfamiliar words. Use **context clues** to determine the meaning.
2. Define the following words according to their **context**:

* **Stalks =**
* **Clipped =**
* **Trill =**
* **Dawn-bright lawn =**

1. Highlight **key details**. What stands out to you as you read?
2. Sketch what is going on in each stanza. What are the actions? What can you see or hear in each stanza?

**Reread the poem.**

1. Next to each stanza, write down whether the stanza is about the “free” or the “caged” bird.
2. What do you notice? Can you think of any reasons why the poem should be **structured** in such a way? Why would the poet want to arrange the ideas about a free bird and a caged bird into separate stanzas?
3. What might the following **images** in the poem **symbolize**?

a. The narrow cage

b. Clipped wings and tied feet

c. The distant hill

d. The grave of dreams

e. Things unknown but longed for still

f. A caged bird

g. A free bird

1. Look at the descriptions of the “free bird” in stanzas 1 and 4. Note down all the images of freedom. How well do they describe freedom?
2. Look at the descriptions of the “caged bird” in stanzas 2, 3, 5 and 6. Note down all the images of captivity. How well do they describe captivity?
3. What does the poem say about social injustice?
4. Now that you’ve explored the symbolism in the poem, what message do you think the poem is making? What big ideas do you think the poet wants us to get from the poem? This is the **central idea** or **theme** in the poem.

**Caged Bird by Maya Angelou**

A free bird leaps

on the back of the wind  
and floats downstream  
till the current ends  
and dips his wing  
in the orange sun rays  
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks  
down his narrow cage  
can seldom see through  
his bars of rage  
his wings are clipped and  
his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings  
with a fearful trill  
of things unknown  
but longed for still  
and his tune is heard  
on the distant hill  
for the caged bird  
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze  
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees  
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn-bright lawn  
and he names the sky his own.  
But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams  
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream  
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings  
with a fearful trill  
of things unknown  
but longed for still  
and his tune is heard  
on the distant hill  
for the caged bird  
sings of freedom.

