

Phenomenal Woman By Maya Angelou

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.
I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's
size
But when I start to tell them,
They think I'm telling lies.
I say,
It's in the reach of my arms,
The span of my hips,
The stride of my step,
The curl of my lips.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

I walk into a room
Just as cool as you please,
And to a man,
The fellows stand or
Fall down on their knees.
Then they swarm around me,
A hive of honey bees.
I say,
It's the fire in my eyes,
And the flash of my teeth,
The swing in my waist,
And the joy in my feet.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

Men themselves have wondered
What they see in me.
They try so much
But they can't touch
My inner mystery.
When I try to show them,
They say they still can't see.
I say,
It's in the arch of my back,
The sun of my smile,
The ride of my breasts,
The grace of my style.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

Now you understand
Just why my head's not bowed.
I don't shout or jump about
Or have to talk real loud.
When you see me passing,
It ought to make you proud.
I say,
It's in the click of my heels,
The bend of my hair,
the palm of my hand,
The need for my care.
'Cause I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

THE POEM – the meaning and message

The poem “Phenomenal Woman” describes the spirit of womanhood. The poem describes a woman who is proud of being a woman, who is confident, follows her heart, has faith in herself and believes in her inner strength. Such a woman is ‘phenomenally phenomenal.’

The poet tells her readers to ignore the conventional view of being beautiful which is only related to physical appearance. Instead the poet asks us to feel proud of what God has endowed us with. Women should not succumb to the artificial canons of beauty. Maya Angelou reminds us that our beauty lies much beyond the outer appearance.

She lists down some qualities that make truly phenomenal and why other women and men find her beauty mysterious.

“Phenomenal Woman” begins with a stark comment saying that she is neither cute nor has a great figure to suit a model’s size. She tells that ‘pretty women’ often wonders where the secret of her success lies. Moreover when she reveals her so-called secrets to them, they refuse to believe her. She describes her secret saying that it comes from her confidence, the way she stretches her arms, the way she walks, the rhythm of her hips and also the way she smiles. Her entire body is an expression of womanliness. Maya Angelou concludes the first stanza by saying that she is a ‘phenomenal woman’. Here the word ‘phenomenal’ can have dual meanings, one that is she is huge and the second, she has a towering personality. Thus she is huge in both physique and personality. In the second stanza, Maya says that no matter how cool she enters a room, men fall for her and falls on their knees, they swarm around her like bees. She claims that it’s the passion in her eyes, the shine of her teeth when she smiles, the movement of her waist and the lightness of her feet that win men over. She is phenomenally a phenomenal woman. She considers herself as supreme and outstanding.

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In the third stanza, she says she remains a mystery to men. Men often wonder why they fancy her. They try hard as much as they can to understand her mystery but they cannot touch her soul. Actually, they fail to understand that her mystery lies in her womanhood. She indicates to them that her mystery is not obscure but clearly expressed in her body language from the curve to her back, to her smile and rhythm of her bosom. In fact, her influence lies in her grace, in her femininity. In the last stanza, she asks her readers that they must have understood by then her power and influence on others and why her head is never bowed that is she walks confidently with her head always held high. She says that she need not have to jump or talk loudly to grab attention when she walks by. She influences all by passing quietly yet full of expression in every gesture she makes. She declares that her power lies in the sound of her heels, the curve in her hair, the palm of her hand. Finally, she restates the fact she is a 'phenomenal woman.'

Throughout the poem, we find the spirit of womanhood is highlighted. Maya Angelou's "Phenomenal Woman" asserts the theme that 'Beauty is more than skin deep.' She refutes the theory that beautiful women should have well proportioned physique and vital statistics. She disapproves the distorted view of beauty, which emphasizes more on outer beauty than inner beauty. She argues that true beauty lies within and body language is the medium through which it is expressed.

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The use of the first pronoun 'I' indicates that the poet is talking about herself. The poet was subjected to various kind of oppression and discrimination based on race and gender. The poet is an African-American. She has experienced racial discrimination, rape and oppression in America. The American standard of beauty is to have fair colour, sharp features and blue eyes. But the African American women do not conform to these standards. On the other hand, Maya Angelou believes that inner beauty is the real beauty of a woman. She feels confident in her curvaceous body and huge physique. She finds joy in her womanhood. The poem is a reflection of her life which was full of struggle. Maya Angelou concludes the first stanza of 'Phenomenal Woman' by saying that she is a 'phenomenal woman'. Here the word 'phenomenal' can have dual meanings, one that is she is huge and the second, she has a towering personality. Thus, she is huge in both physique and personality.

The poet tells her readers to ignore the conventional view of being beautiful which is only related to physical appearance. Instead the poet asks us to feel proud of what God has endowed us with. Women should not succumb to the artificial canons of beauty. Maya Angelou reminds us that our beauty lies much beyond the outer appearance. The tone of the poem is that of a strong, confident woman who does not bother what people think about her. She finds happiness in her womanhood. In the first three stanzas, she describes what other people think about and her reaction towards their viewpoint. She is not embarrassed about her huge physique. She considers herself a supreme woman and celebrates womanhood. Maya says that no matter how cool she enters a room, men fall for her and falls on their knees, they swarm around her like bees. She claims that it's the passion in her eyes, the shine of her teeth when she smiles, the movement of her waist and the lightness of her feet that win men over. She is phenomenally a phenomenal woman. She considers herself as supreme and outstanding.

Thus, Maya Angelou is best known for addressing the world through the medium of her own life. Her works are a reflection of the social issues that were prevalent in the second half of the 20th century. "Phenomenal Woman" by Maya Angelou celebrates femininity and highlights the traits necessary for a woman to become 'phenomenal.' She believes that it is not the outer beauty of a person but the

inner one which makes each woman phenomenal. She criticizes the biased societal expression that expects women to starve themselves in order to be considered 'pretty.'

Maya Angelou - Her life

She was born **Marguerite Annie Johnson**; (April 4, 1928 – May 28, 2014) was an American poet, memoirist, and civil rights activist. She published seven autobiographies, three books of essays, several books of poetry, and was credited with a list of plays, movies, and television shows spanning over 50 years. She received dozens of awards and more than 50 honorary degrees.

Angelou recited her poem "On the Pulse of Morning" (1993) at President Bill Clinton's inauguration, making her the first poet to make an inaugural recitation since Robert Frost at President John F. Kennedy's inauguration in 1961. Her recitation resulted in more fame and recognition for her previous works, and broadened her appeal "across racial, economic, and educational boundaries".^[73] The recording of the poem won a Grammy Award

With the publication of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Angelou publicly discussed aspects of her personal life. She was respected as a spokesperson for black people and women, and her works have been considered a defense of black culture. Her works are widely used in schools and universities worldwide although attempts have been made to ban her books from some U. S. libraries. Angelou's most celebrated works have been labeled as autobiographical fiction, but many critics consider them to be autobiographies. She made a deliberate attempt to challenge the common structure of the autobiography by critiquing, changing and expanding the genre. Her books center on themes such as racism, identity, family and travel.

Angelou wrote a total of seven autobiographies. According to scholar Mary Jane Lupton, Angelou's third autobiography *Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas* marked the first time a well-known African-American autobiographer had written a third volume about her life. Her books "stretch over time and place", from Arkansas to Africa and back to the U.S., and take place from the beginnings of World War II to the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. She published her seventh autobiography *Mom & Me & Mom* in 2013, at the age of 85. Critics have tended to judge Angelou's subsequent autobiographies "in light of the first" with *Caged Bird* receiving the highest praise. Angelou wrote five collections of essays, which writer Hilton Als called her "wisdom books" and "homilies strung together with autobiographical texts". Angelou used the same editor throughout her writing career, Robert Loomis, an executive editor at Random House; he retired in 2011 and has been called "one of publishing's hall of fame editors." Angelou said regarding Loomis: "We have a relationship that's kind of famous among publishers".

Angelou's long and extensive career also included poetry, plays, screenplays for television and film, directing, acting, and public speaking. She was a prolific writer of poetry; her volume *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Diiie* (1971) was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize, and she was chosen by President Bill Clinton to recite her poem "On the Pulse of Morning" during his inauguration in 1993.

Angelou's successful acting career included roles in numerous plays, films, and television programs, including her appearance in the television mini-series *Roots* in 1977. Her screenplay, *Georgia, Georgia* (1972), was the first original script by a black woman to be produced, and she was the first African-American woman to direct a major motion picture, *Down in the Delta*, in 1998.

