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"Black Boy" by Richard Wright and "I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings" by Maya Angelou are two autobiographical memoirs that take place in the harsh setting of the American South in the early 1900s. Both works of non-fiction describe the memories and experiences of each author during their ~~adolescence~~ childhood and adolescence. ~~By~~ By using selected moments and anecdotal references, the reader is provided with individual insight into the struggle each author endured with the ongoing theme of severe racial segregation and the oppression and hatred that was caused. There is a large scope of memories presented by Angelou and Wright, ~~presented~~ <sup>executed</sup> in a different manner and pace. Along with the inclusion of fleeting joyous moments, there is a large selection of rougher or "dark" and "negative" memories. Often the most violent and destructive memories that can be similarly compared in both works, are the ones from which a positive lesson was learned.

Both young Maya and Richard were able to resort to the comfort of literature, as a way to deal with their difficult individual experiences. Some of the most painful encounters led each character to this form of escape, something that helped them strive for ~~the best~~ <sup>their interests</sup> and



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continue to remain true to their identity. For young Maya, this event was remembered as a horrific sexual violation, when Mr Freeman raped her at the age of eight. After several occasions of molestation, Mr. Freeman took advantage of her youth through the most extreme sexual assault, whilst instilling a sense of fear and guilt in her mind. He made her promise not to tell a soul, however after the truth was revealed which led to his eventual fate of death Maya felt she was to blame. For two years after she rarely spoke and internalized all of her emotions. Maya at age eight had completely lost her value of self-worth and respect. Mrs. Flowers became one of her role models as she introduced her to the idea of expressing herself through reading aloud, and eventually writing<sup>Mrs</sup>. Flowers helped her find her sense of dignity and self as well as ~~the~~ affirming the power of the human voice. As she stated: "Words were different than set on paper. It takes the power of the human voice to infuse them with shades of deeper meaning."

Parallel to this exploration of Literature after such a catastrophic event, young Richard is able to develop his talent of writing through the rejection of religion. For members of Richard's family, following an extremist religion was part of the status quo. With his grandmother being a member of the "Seven day Adventist" church and his Aunt Addie a protestant, everyone had high expectations. Richard states that he



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does not need religion as he believes he was a formed human before being introduced to faith. His mother encourages him to attend a baptism, though all he can pay attention to is the ~~the~~ existence of religious hypocrisy. He comes to the conclusion that, "this business of saving souls had no ethics. Every relationship was shamelessly exploited." (182) Due to ~~the~~ <sup>his</sup> complete rejection of religion, nearly all of his family members disown him as their relative. With their lack of understanding his motives, domestic violence and abuse towards young Richard reach a climax. Like the sexual abuse that Maya endured, this terrifying physical abuse drives him further from his home and closer to his love of writing. Literature becomes his own form of religion, becoming his single drive to keep living. Amongst extreme poverty, hunger, and domestic abuse, Richard writes and publishes his own story in the local paper ~~at~~ <sup>a</sup> before the age of ten.

\* The library becomes her place of refuge, and books become her protection.

In both memoirs the mention of a specific graduation is an example of a negative memory caused by severe racial oppression. Richard is chosen to be the speaker at ninth grade graduation, and he is told he cannot read his own speech due to the expectations of the two white guests attending. He exhibits an example of his strong



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sense of morale and ability to stand strong by reading it despite the lack of encouragement. This shows how he did not become a victim of the reigning power the "whites" had. In "Caged Bird", there are two white Speakers who come to Maya's graduation. They emphasize the lack of intellectual potential for the Black School in Stamps by referring to the renovations of the White School. After being downgraded by two single men, the entirety of the audience falls into despair. Following that downfall, in order to raise their spirits, the valedictorian Henry sings the "negro national anthem." Slowly the entire room joins in, and their collective ability to fight against ~~the~~ sheer hatred is renewed. Maya reflects in Chapter Eight: "We were on top again. As always, again. We had survived." This once again shows the positive function of displaying moments of racial violation highlighting the sense of community and companionship.

Finally, one more clear similarity can be made between Maya and Richard's first encounter working for a white family. Each character is shown complete disrespect by their bosses, and in return, they remain true to their self respect and leave their jobs. Maya's boss chooses to call her "Mary" instead of her full name "Marguerite" because it is "easier to utter." In response she



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smashes plates in order to get kicked out of the house. In Richard's case, his boss disregards his ability to write "You will never be able to write. Who put such ideas in your Nigger head?" Richard feels completely disrespected by her act of ignorance and racial hatred, that he vows to never return again. This selection of mentioning these events shows how strong and independent Maya and Richard are as young people, and their ability to walk away from something so negative and discouraging.

Though the inclusion of similar memories for each memoir serves a similar function, the presentation of these "snapshots" as well as selection is quite different. The aspect of narration falls under the organization of function, and each author has chosen to narrate these experiences and lessons in a different manner. Angelou has chosen to tell her own story often from "young Maya's" perspective. An example of this is shown through Maya's youthful interpretation of the rape. Her naïveté and innocence highlights the extremity of this ~~a~~ sexual violation, and exhibits her lack of understanding as a young girl. This youthful register that is applied to the narrative, helps the reader interpret events in a more personal way. Opposing this writing style, Wright has chosen to take



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the stance of an Adult, weaving his thoughts and interpretations into his childhood and "coming of age" memories.

The selection and portrayal of these "dark" or "negative" memories also differs between author's. Though both "Black Boy" and "Caged Bird" "I know why The Caged Bird Sings" highlight important life changing moments Angelou brings them into context. She is able to "zoom out" on specific events and show their ultimate effect on the course of her life. A reference to this takes place when Maya's brother Bailey is at her bedside after the rape in the hospital. She recounts how he cried next to her, and how that would be the last time she would see him cry for the next fifteen years. This shows how rare it is for Bailey to act in such a way therefore re-inforcing the seriousness of this event.

Though each author presents these defining moments or "memories" in a different way, the largest struggles for each character are what made Maya and Richard into such strong people. Through these dark times and terrifying experiences, they were each able to come out the other side with wisdom and new knowledge. Though one may



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interpret these moments as constricting and confining their opportunities, they were able to find positive reinforcement with literature and strive for the best. As concluded at the end of Wright's "Black Boy": "This is the culture from which I sprang, this is the error from which I fled." (303)



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