

“Occupation: Conductorette” from I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou
Literary Analysis: Author’s Perspective

The **author’s perspective** in a literary work includes the judgments, attitudes, and experiences the author brings to the subject.

- An author’s perspective determines which details he or she includes. For example, a writer with firsthand experience of an event might report his or her own reactions as well as generally known facts. A writer with a positive view of a subject may emphasize its benefits.
- A work may combine several perspectives. For example, a writer may tell what it felt like to live through an event. In addition, the writer may express his or her present views of the experience.

In the following passage from “Occupation: Conductorette,” Maya Angelou recalls her reaction to being told that African Americans could not work on streetcars.

I would like to claim an immediate fury which was followed by the noble determination to break the restricting tradition. But the truth is, my first reaction was one of disappointment.

The author tells how she reacted at the time of the incident, and she also expresses her current attitude about the event.

DIRECTIONS: For each of the following passages, write the author’s reactions to the incident at the time and her present-day attitude toward the event.

1. The next three weeks were a honeycomb of determination with apertures for the days to go in and out. The Negro organizations to whom I appealed for support bounced me back and forth like a shuttlecock on a badminton court. Why did I insist on that particular job? Openings were going begging that paid nearly twice the money. The minor officials with whom I was able to win an audience thought me mad. Possibly I was.

Author’s Reaction at the Time	Author’s Attitude Today

2. “I am applying for the job listed in this morning’s *Chronicle* and I’d like to be presented to your personnel manager.” While I spoke in supercilious accents, and looked at the room as if I had an oil well in my own backyard, my armpits were being pricked by millions of hot pointed needles.

Author’s Reaction at the Time	Author’s Attitude Today

“Occupation: Conductorette” from I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou
Reading: Use Prior Knowledge to Make Predictions

As you read, **make predictions**, or educated guesses, about what will happen next based on your own experience and details in a text. **Verify**, or confirm, predictions by comparing the outcome you predicted to the actual outcome. **Revise**, or adjust, your predictions as you gather more information.

- **Strategy:** To help you make, verify, and revise predictions, **ask questions**, such as *Will the main character succeed?*
- For each question you ask, record your predictions and how they change with new information.

Read the following passage from “Occupation: Conductorette.”

In the offices of the Market Street Railway Company, the receptionist seemed as surprised to see me there as I was surprised to find the interior dingy and the décor drab. Somehow I had expected waxed surfaces and carpeted floors. If I had met no resistance, I might have decided against working for such a poor-mouth-looking concern.

You can make a prediction about the rest of the selection by asking yourself a question such as this: *Will the receptionist make it impossible for the author to get a job?*

DIRECTIONS: *Make a prediction about each of the following passages from the text. Write the details from the text and from your own experiences that helped you make your prediction.*

1. I wouldn't move into the streetcar but stood on the ledge over the conductor, glaring. My mind shouted so energetically that the announcement made my veins stand out, and my mouth tighten into a prune.

I WOULD HAVE THE JOB. I WOULD BE A CONDUCTORETTE.

Predict: Will the author keep trying to get the job? _____

Details from the text that support my prediction: _____

My own experiences that support my prediction: _____

2. On my way out of the house one morning she said, “Life is going to give you just what you put in it. Put your whole heart in everything you do, and pray, then you can wait.” Another time she reminded me that “God helps those who help themselves.”

Predict: Will the author take her mother's advice? _____

Details from the text that support my prediction: _____

My own experiences that support my prediction: _____

“Occupation: Conductorette” from I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou
Vocabulary Builder

Word List

dexterous dingy hypocrisy indignation self-sufficiency supercilious

A. DIRECTIONS: Think about the meaning of each italicized word. Then, answer the question.

1. If a friend wants to prove her *self-sufficiency* to you, what will she probably say when you offer to help her?

2. If an actor has a *supercilious* attitude during an interview, what might the interviewer write about him?

3. What needs to be done to a room that is *dingy*?

4. If someone’s remarks cause you to feel *indignation*, what might that person have said?

5. What could a vegetarian do that would reveal his or her *hypocrisy*?

6. Your friend is very *dexterous* in language arts, so what does she probably like to do?

B. WORD STUDY: The Latin prefix *super-* means “above.” Provide an explanation for your answer to each question containing a word with the prefix *super-*: *superfluous*, *supersede*, *superscript*

1. If you have *superfluous* paper in your backpack, do you need to save it?

2. If you want a new piece of your artwork to *supersede* the picture on the wall, what will you do?

3. When you write a *superscript* on a journal entry, what have you done?

Name _____ Date _____

“Occupation: Conductorette” from I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou
Enrichment: Create a Resume

Maya Angelou did not have a resume when she applied for the streetcar job, but nowadays even a beginning worker is expected to have one. A resume lists your accomplishments, from education to work experience to community service. It helps an employer see your strengths at a glance.

DIRECTIONS: Fill out the following resume with your own information or with the information of an imaginary student. Try to emphasize your strengths (or the imaginary student’s) as a worker and a citizen.

Resume

Name: _____

Address: _____

Education (most recent grade completed): _____

School Name: _____

Previous Employment (position and dates):

Name of Employer: _____ Dates Employed: _____

Responsibilities: _____

Name of Employer: _____ Dates Employed: _____

Responsibilities: _____

Community Service: _____

Computer Skills: _____

Hobbies: _____

References Available from (name and address of two reference providers): _____

from Swimming to Antarctica by Lynne Cox

“Occupation: Conductorette” from I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou

Integrate Language Skills: Grammar

Concrete and Abstract Nouns

A **concrete** noun is a word that names a specific person, place, or thing that can be seen or recognized through any of the five senses. An **abstract noun** is a word that names an idea, an action, a condition, or a quality that cannot be seen, heard, smelled, tasted, or touched. The following are examples of concrete and abstract nouns.

Concrete nouns: desk, window, hallway, Tom, closet, wife, Times Square

Abstract nouns: tomorrow, conscience, deceit, intention, fear

A. DIRECTIONS: Read the following sentences from the excerpt from *Swimming to Antarctica* and from *“Occupation Conductorette.”* Underline the nouns. Write **C** above each concrete noun and **A** above each abstract noun.

1. I had mixed feelings about the test swim.
2. I stared across the icy water at Neko Harbor’s beach and felt excitement building within me.
3. She comprehended the perversity of life, that in the struggle lies the joy.
4. I choked and felt a wave of panic rise within me.
5. The next three weeks were a honeycomb of determination with apertures for the days to go in and out.

B. Writing Application: Write a brief paragraph in which you summarize Lynne Cox’s swim. Use a combination of abstract and concrete nouns, including at least four of the following words: cold, water, exhaustion, penguins, excitement, beach.

from Swimming to Antarctica by Lynne Cox

“Occupation: Conductorette” *from I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou

Integrated Language Skills: Support for Writing a Description

DIRECTIONS: *A description should appeal to the senses. Fill in the following chart with details you might observe in Antarctica or on a streetcar in the 1940s that appeal to each of the five senses. Use precise words.*

<p>Details I Might See</p>	
<p>Details I Might Smell</p>	
<p>Details I Might Hear</p>	
<p>Details I Might Touch</p>	
<p>Details I Might Taste</p>	

Now, use the details you have collected to write your description.

Name _____ Date _____

from Swimming to Antarctica by Lynne Cox

“Occupation: Conductorette” *from I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou

Integrated Language Skills: Support for Extend Your Learning

Research and Technology

On the following lines, write the skills you will be charting, the state of your skills as you begin your journal, and the state of your skills at the end of the two weeks.

My Skills: _____

At Beginning of Two Weeks: _____

At End of Two Weeks: _____

Research and Technology

On the following lines, write the job you will be observing. Write your reasons for wanting the job. At the end of two weeks, write whether you still feel the same way about the job, and explain why or why not.

The Job I Will Observe: _____

Why I Want the Job: _____

How I Feel About the Job at End of Two Weeks: _____
