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ENGL 105

07/25/19

Phenomenal Women Come in all Colors

“Phenomenal Woman,” by Maya Angelou, expresses the belief that women can be strong individuals and amazing representations of society. This poem was originally published in 1995, and year after year, it has become more and more recognized for its sophistication. The speaker of the poem portrays her goals for what she wanted her readers to get out of her poem through every line in which is presented. Within the poem, Angelou makes it present to imply that African American women should be judged by their accomplishments and drive to succeed, rather than be looked at as minorities with little to offer the world. She explains how the use of direct language about imperfections between the black and white race acknowledge ways in which it needs to be addressed for the near future. When reading “Phenomenal Woman,” it is clear to see the confidence she brings through her words, and the sense of empowerment that comes along with it.

The poem uses a great amount of emotion, in which allows readers to feel the highly charged topics, such as racial injustice, black awareness, and especially women empowerment. This method can change one’s feelings to line up with the speaker of the poem. “They go from excitement of love to outrage over racial injustice, from the pride of blackness and African heritage to suffered slurs” (Hagen, 2001). The use of words and tone make the biggest difference when it comes to trying to alter perspectives of others. The poem also uses a technique of

maintaining a constant rhythm. “If the emotional content can be considered the bricks of the poem, the rhythm would be the mortar that binds. Angelou is a natural builder of poetry for she not only has a keen sensitivity to feeling, but also a marvelous sense of rhythm” (Hagen, 2001). “Phenomenal Woman” uses the repetition of the lines “I’m a woman / Phenomenally. / Phenomenal woman, / That’s me” in order to keep her rhythm flowing all the way to the end of each stanza (Angelou, 10-12). She also makes each line about the same in length, and allows many of the last words of each line to rhyme with the next. These techniques let the poem come together as a whole, line after line, and keep the same tempo throughout the entirety of the poem.

Within “Phenomenal Woman,” it is clear to see that another technique is also used. It is in the format of which the poem is written. A use of repetition is noticed, considering the same few lines are used to close each stanza. Within those closing lines, the two main words, “woman,” and “phenomenally” are restated. First off, the word “woman” is stated multiple times, because that is what the speaker of the poem is trying to assure that the readers capture. Angelou allows the audience to know exactly who she is and how she wants to be seen as, which is a “woman.” On the other hand, the word “phenomenally” remains to be a statement in and of itself, with no other words to help support it. This emphasizes the characteristic of the “woman” that is being described. Since “phenomenally” stands alone, it carries a greater power when read by the readers of the poem, forcing them to comprehend the true meaning of the word. Angelou is fully aware of which way to go about obtaining the desired response she wants her audience to feel. “I study my craft. I don’t simply write what I feel, let it all hang out...Learning the craft, understanding what language can do, gaining control of the language, enables one to make people weep, make them go to war” (Angelou and Tate, 2001). Throughout the poem

“Phenomenal Woman,” it is clear that Angelou put in the thought in order to figure out a method to precisely word her knowledge in a way in which would best allow her readers to get the most out of it. For example, instead of Angelou expressing herself through one of her stanzas within her poem by saying, ‘When I walk into a room, people stare and look at me, as if they do not know why I am there,’ she says, “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” (14-20). For her to word her words in the way she does, makes the biggest difference, especially when it comes to the desired reaction of her audience. The bees represent the discouraging people standing among the speaker of the poem, while Angelou represents a standing sense of accomplishment. To use a simile in order to compare the many people who look at Angelou without the best intentions in mind, to a swarm of honey bees, allows the reader to understand the type of scene she is trying to portray.

The emotion that comes through “Phenomenal Woman,” allows us to draw connections with the motivation/influence Angelou had when writing the poem initially. For instance, in Angelou’s past, she had survived rape at the young age of seven or eight, which inevitably took a tremendous toll on her. Due to this incident, she shut herself down, and decided not to speak of her rapist because she thought that it would make things worse for him (Townes, 2014). It took her some time to realize that literature was her way of finding her voice again and expressing her true feelings, while also inspiring others to not be afraid to do the same. Through this sense of inspiration, Angelou allows people to get important morals out of her writing.

“The gift that Maya Angelou gave us was the power of testimony... She taught that we must use our voices to speak truth with as much clarity and passion as possible...There

are times when circumstances are unfair and even violent. However, Angelou also taught us that we cannot ignore or avoid these harsh realities. Rather, it is important to never give up on hope, and it is a tragedy to live our lives in despair” (Townes, 2014).

This is an example of what the author of this article, Emilie M. Townes, highlights from the poem “Phenomenal Woman.” She understood the way in which Angelou strongly enforced women to use their voices when it comes to every aspect of their lives. She notices that their voices are their only source when it comes to speaking their truth. Lines such as, “It’s the fire in my eyes, / and the flash of my teeth, / the swing in my waist, / and the joy in my feet” (22-25), are very noticeable within the poem. Words such as “fire” and “flash” are there to represent the passion that is being expressed, while words such as “the joy in my feet,” represents the truth that she speaks and allows others to realize that what she is talking about is worth acknowledging. She inspires women to show their doubters what they are really made of in the end, once they have accomplished their dreams and goals in life.

Since she makes direct points, she assures the fact that one will hear exactly what they need to hear through her writing.

“Angelou’s poems celebrate black people, men and women; at the same time, they bear witness to the trials of black people in this country. Implicitly or directly, whites are called to account, yet Angelou’s poetry, steeped though it is in the languages and cultures of black America, does not exclude whites...the poems are generous in their directness, in the humor Angelou finds alongside her outrage and pain, in their robust embrace of life” (Cookson, 2001).

This representation of Angelou's writing is very important to understand because if certain people are not confronted in a direct manner, they will continue to do what is not asked or wanted of them to do. In other words, being direct is not necessarily a bad thing, it is simply a necessary thing to do in some cases, as long as it is done respectfully. As Angelou expresses her straight to the point demeanor, she does so in a way to acknowledge the tension that is set between African American people, and Caucasian people. She recognizes the inconsistencies among the two races, and notes that real change needs to occur very soon, in regards to all races being looked at in the same way.

In conclusion, Angelou has become one of the most famous women poets of all time, due to her strong determination and influence presented through her writings. Her poems, one of them being "Phenomenal Woman," has impacted and changed many lives that needed to hear her inspirational words in order to overcome their situations. Angelou's words have allowed women, with African American women in particular, to begin to be seen with a sense of confidence, and passion for everything in which they accomplish. Whether it is in sports, at the workplace, or at home, a lack of drive for anyone to notice is not present. Within the words of the poem, they remain to be direct and powerful. There is a truth that has been identified, about the lack of proper acknowledgment to the African American race. In other words, it has been seen that the whites had been pointed out on not giving blacks the necessary credit in which they deserve. Through the emotional poem of "Phenomenal Woman," the whites were not necessarily called out in a poorly manner, however, they were noted in a way in which they can clearly see their faults, and be able to fix them for the soon and upcoming future for all races. It is the words in "Phenomenal Woman" that shines through and allows her readers to be inspired to do the same.

Angelou has left behind a grand legacy, with her poems affecting people positively each and every day.

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