three secondary sources found in your college library or on the Internet. (We list a few below to get you started.) Make sure to include and cite your research, using a format or style approved by your instructor.

READ MORE

Hughes and His Works

Gates, Henry Louis and K. A. Appiah, eds. *Langston Hughes: Critical Perspectives Past and Present.* New York: Amistad P, 1993.

"Langston Hughes" (http://www.poets.org/poets/poets.cfm?prmID=84): *Background on Hughes's life and work, along with selected texts online, at the Academy of American Poets.*

Revival Meetings/Early Twentieth-Century African-American Culture and History

"The Encyclopedia Britannica Guide to Black History" (http://www.blackhistory.eb.com/): *Articles on many aspects of African-American history, with audio and video, links, bibliographies, and much more.*

Raboteau, Albert J. *African-American Religion.* New York: Oxford UP, 1999.

Grandmother's Victory

Maya Angelou

Born Marguerita Johnson in 1928, Maya Angelou spent most of her childhood in Stamps, Arkansas, where her family owned the general store that is the setting for this selection. After a difficult youth, Angelou became a dancer, an actress, and a writer. She has performed all over the world, most notably in the U.S. State Department–sponsored production of Porgy and Bess, *in the television miniseries* Roots, *and in a production of Jean Genet's* The Blacks. *She also has taught dance in Rome and Tel Aviv. Active in the civil rights movement, Angelou was appointed northern director for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference by Martin Luther King, Jr., in the 1960s. In 1970, she published the first volume of her autobiography,* I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, *of which this selection is the fifth chapter. Three other volumes followed. Angelou also has written several books of poetry, including* And Still I Rise *(1978) and* I Shall Not Be Moved *(1990). Recent works include three autobiographies:* The Heart of a Woman *(1981),* Shaker, Why Don't You Sing? *(1983), and* All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes *(1986).*

from 75 Readings Plus, 7th Edition.
Ed. Busceni + Smith. NY: McGraw Hill, 2004.

In the selection that follows, Angelou reveals much about the personality of the woman who raised her. Through amazing patience, self-control, and perseverance, Angelou's grandmother becomes for us an icon of spiritual stability, a bulwark against racism and stupidity, and proof that through strength of character we can rise above the world no matter how vile and stupid it may sometimes be.

1 "Thou shall not be dirty" and "Thou shall not be impudent" were the two commandments of Grandmother Henderson upon which hung our total salvation.

2 Each night in the bitterest winter we were forced to wash faces, arms, necks, legs, and feet before going to bed. She used to add, with a smirk that unprofane people can't control when venturing into profanity, "and wash as far as possible, then wash possible."

3 We would go to the well and wash in the ice-cold, clear water, grease our legs with the equally cold stiff Vaseline, then tiptoe into the house. We wiped the dust from our toes and settled down for schoolwork, cornbread, clabbered milk, prayers, and bed, always in that order. Momma was famous for pulling the quilts off after we had fallen asleep to examine our feet. If they weren't clean enough for her, she took the switch (she kept one behind the bedroom door for emergencies) and woke up the offender with a few aptly placed burning reminders.

4 The area around the well at night was dark and slick, and boys told about how snakes love water, so that anyone who had to draw water at night and then stand there alone and wash knew that moccasins and rattlers, puff adders, and boa constrictors were winding their way to the well and would arrive just as the person washing got soap in her eyes. But Momma convinced us that not only was cleanliness next to Godliness, dirtiness was the inventor of misery.

5 The impudent child was detested by God and a shame to its parents and could bring destruction to its house and line. All adults had to be addressed as Mister, Missus, Miss, Auntie, Cousin, Unk, Uncle, Buhbah, Sister, Brother, and a thousand other appellations indicating familial relationship and the lowliness of the addressor.

6 Everyone I knew respected these customary laws, except for the powhitetrash children.

7 Some families of powhitetrash lived on Momma's farmland behind the school. Sometimes a gaggle of them came to the Store, filling the whole room, chasing out the air, and even changing the well-known scents. The children crawled over the shelves and into the potato and onion bins, twanging all the time in their sharp voices like cigar-box guitars. They took liberties in my Store that I would never dare. Since Momma told us that the less you say to whitefolks (or even powhitetrash) the better, Bailey and I would stand, solemn, quiet, in the displaced air. But if one of the playful

apparitions got close to us, I pinched it. Partly out of angry frustration and partly because I didn't believe in its flesh reality.

8 They called my uncle by his first name and ordered him around the Store. He, to my crying shame, obeyed them in his limping dip-straight-dip fashion.

9 My grandmother, too, followed their orders, except that she didn't seem to be servile because she anticipated their needs.

10 "Here's sugar, Miz Potter, and here's baking powder. You didn't buy soda last month, you'll probably be needing some."

11 Momma always directed her statements to the adults, but sometimes, Oh painful sometimes, the grimy, snotty-nosed girls would answer her.

12 "Naw, Annie. . ."—to Momma? Who owned the land they lived on? Who forgot more than they would ever learn? If there was any justice in the world, God should strike them dumb at once!—"Just give us some extra sody crackers, and some more mackerel."

13 At least they never looked in her face, or I never caught them doing so. Nobody with a smidgen of training, not even the worst roustabout, would look right in a grown person's face. It meant the person was trying to take the words out before they were formed. The dirty little children didn't do that, but they threw their orders around the Store like lashes from a cat-o'-nine-tails.

14 When I was around ten years old, those scruffy children caused me the most painful and confusing experience I had ever had with my grandmother.

15 One summer morning, after I had swept the dirt yard of leaves, spearmint-gum wrappers and Vienna-sausage labels, I raked the yellow-red dirt, and made half-moons carefully, so that the design stood out clearly and mask-like. I put the rake behind the Store and came through the back of the house to find Grandmother on the front porch in her big, wide white apron. The apron was so stiff by virtue of the starch that it could have stood alone. Momma was admiring the yard, so I joined her. It truly looked like a flat redhead that had been raked with a big-toothed comb. Momma didn't say anything but I knew she liked it. She looked over toward the school principal's house and to the right at Mr. McElroy's. She was hoping one of those community pillars would see the design before the day's business wiped it out. Then she looked upward to the school. My head had swung with hers, so at just about the same time we saw a troop of powhitetrash kids marching over the hill and down by the side of the school.

16 I looked to Momma for direction. She did an excellent job of sagging from her waist down, but from the waist up she seemed to be pulling for the top of the oak tree across the road. Then she began to moan a hymn. Maybe not to moan, but the tune was so slow and the meter so strange that she could have been moaning. She didn't look at me again. When the children reached halfway down the hill, halfway to the Store, she said without turning, "Sister, go on inside."

17 I wanted to beg her, "Momma, don't wait for them. Come on inside with me. If they come in the Store, you go to the bedroom and let me wait on them. They only frighten me if you're around. Alone I know how to handle them." But of course I couldn't say anything, so I went in and stood behind the screen door.

18 Before the girls got to the porch I heard their laughter crackling and popping like pine logs in a cooking stove. I suppose my lifelong paranoia was born in those cold, molasses-slow minutes. They came finally to stand on the ground in front of Momma. At first they pretended seriousness. Then one of them wrapped her right arm in the crook of her left, pushed out her mouth and started to hum. I realized that she was aping my grandmother. Another said, "Naw, Helen, you ain't standing like her. This here's it." Then she lifted her chest, folded her arms and mocked that strange carriage that was Annie Henderson. Another laughed, "Naw, you can't do it. Your mouth ain't pooched out enough. It's like this."

19 I thought about the rifle behind the door, but I knew I'd never be able to hold it straight, and the .410, our sawed-off shotgun, which stayed loaded and was fired every New Year's night, was locked in the trunk and Uncle Willie had the key on his chain. Through the fly-specked screen door, I could see that the arms of Momma's apron jiggled from the vibrations of her humming. But her knees seemed to have locked as if they would never bend again.

20 She sang on. No louder than before, but no softer either. No slower or faster.

21 The dirt of the girls' cotton dresses continued on their legs, feet, arms, and faces to make them all of a piece. Their greasy uncolored hair hung down, uncombed, with a grim finality. I knelt to see them better, to remember them for all time. The tears that had slipped down my dress left unsurprising dark spots, and made the front yard blurry and even more unreal. The world had taken a deep breath and was having doubts about continuing to revolve.

22 The girls had tired of mocking Momma and turned to other means of agitation. One crossed her eyes, stuck her thumbs in both sides of her mouth and said, "Look here, Annie." Grandmother hummed on and the apron strings trembled. I wanted to throw a handful of black pepper in their faces, to throw lye on them, to scream that they were dirty, scummy peckerwoods, but I knew I was as clearly imprisoned behind the scene as the actors outside were confined to their roles.

23 One of the smaller girls did a kind of puppet dance while her fellow clowns laughed at her. But the tall one, who was almost a woman, said something very quietly, which I couldn't hear. They all moved backward from the porch, still watching Momma. For an awful second I

thought they were going to throw a rock at Momma, who seemed (except for the apron strings) to have turned into stone herself. But the big girl turned her back, bent down and put her hands flat on the ground—she didn't pick up anything. She simply shifted her weight and did a hand stand.

24 Her dirty bare feet and long legs went straight for the sky. Her dress fell down around her shoulders, and she had on no drawers. The slick pubic hair made a brown triangle where her legs came together. She hung in the vacuum of that lifeless morning for only a few seconds, then wavered and tumbled. The other girls clapped her on the back and slapped their hands.

25 Momma changed her song to "Bread of Heaven, Bread of Heaven, feed me till I want no more."

26 I found that I was praying too. How long could Momma hold out? What new indignity would they think of to subject her to? Would I be able to stay out of it? What would Momma really like me to do?

27 Then they were moving out of the yard, on their way to town. They bobbed their heads and shook their slack behinds and turned, one at a time:

28 "'Bye, Annie."

29 "'Bye, Annie."

30 "'Bye, Annie."

31 Momma never turned her head or unfolded her arms, but she stopped singing and said, "'Bye, Miz Helen, 'bye, Miz Ruth, 'bye, Miz Eloise."

32 I burst. A firecracker July-the-Fourth burst. How could Momma call them Miz? The mean nasty things. Why couldn't she have come inside the sweet, cool store when we saw them breasting the hill? What did she prove? And then if they were dirty, mean, and impudent, why did Momma have to call them Miz?

33 She stood another whole song through and then opened the screen door to look down on me crying in rage. She looked until I looked up. Her face was a brown moon that shone on me. She was beautiful. Something had happened out there, which I couldn't completely understand, but I could see that she was happy. Then she bent down and touched me as mothers of the church "lay hands on the sick and afflicted" and I quieted.

34 "Go wash your face, Sister." And she went behind the candy counter and hummed, "Glory, glory, hallelujah, when I lay my burden down."

35 I threw the well water on my face and used the weekday handkerchief to blow my nose. Whatever the contest had been out front, I knew Momma had won.

36 I took the rake back to the front yard. The smudged footprints were easy to erase. I worked for a long time on my new design and laid the rake behind the wash pot. When I came back in the Store, I took Momma's hand and we both walked outside to look at the pattern.

3 It was a large heart with lots of hearts growing smaller inside, and piercing from the outside rim to the smallest heart was an arrow. Momma said, "Sister, that's right pretty." Then she turned back to the Store and resumed, "Glory, glory, hallelujah, when I lay my burden down."

1970

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Content

a. Is this simply a story about bad-mannered children and racism? Or is Angelou's intent more complex?
b. Why does the speaker bother to tell us that she made careful patterns when she raked the yard? Why did Momma admire those designs?
c. Angelou describes a number of outdated social observances, such as never looking "right in a grown person's face." What other examples can you find in this selection? Why does she make it a point to include them in this recollection of her childhood?
d. Grandmother Henderson addresses each of the white girls as "Miz." Does her doing so have anything to do with her strange victory over these brats?
e. What details does Angelou use to create this obviously unflattering picture of "powhitetrash children"?
f. What does Angelou mean when she describes her uncle's limping in "dip-straight-dip fashion"?

Strategy and Style

g. In light of what she says early in the narrative, is it important for her to quote all three of the girls as they leave the store (paragraphs 28 through 30)? In general, what effect does Angelou's extensive use of dialogue create?
h. This selection begins with two rather odd commandments, which both startle and amuse the reader. Why are they important to the rest of the essay?
i. Angelou's use of metaphor is brilliant. In paragraph 18, she tells us that her "paranoia was born in those cold, molasses-slow minutes." What other examples of figurative language can you find?
j. How would you describe the speaker's tone at the beginning of this essay? When, exactly, does this tone change?

ENGAGING THE TEXT

a. What does victory mean to Angelou's grandmother? Write a definition of *victory* as Angelou's grandmother would define it.
b. Write your own definition of *victory*. In other words, what does this concept mean to you personally? Compare your definition with that of Angelou's grandmother.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SUSTAINED WRITING

a. Relying on your own experiences, narrate an incident from the life of a relative, friend, or neighbor that illustrates the nobility of his or her character, much in the same way that Angelou illustrates the nobility of her grandmother's character. Through description, dialogue, and action, include details that provide the reader with a vivid picture of the person you are discussing. Address your essay to someone who has never met your subject and/or knows little about him or her.
b. Grandmother Henderson's triumph may well have resided in the fact that she had done a far better job of raising children than had many of her "powhitetrash" neighbors. Analyze Angelou's essay in order to explain this and other sources of Momma's victory. In short, discuss aspects of Momma's character that prompted Angelou to make her the centerpiece of this narrative. Make sure to make direct reference to the essay by quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing it.
c. Both Angelou's "Grandmother's Victory" and Kingston's "No Name Woman" address issues having to do with families and their place in a particular community. How do the two communities in these essays differ? How are they alike? How do the two families in these essays differ? How are they alike?

READ MORE

Angelou and Her Works

"The Academy of American Poets Site on Maya Angelou" (http://www.poets.org/poets/poets.cfm?prmID=88): *An excellent introduction with a bibliography.*

"Maya Angelou (b. 1928)" (http://voices.cla.umn.edu/authors/MayaAngelou.html): *Critical and biographical information about Angelou as well as a bibliography. Includes links to other sites.*

The African-American Family

Littlejohn-Blake, Sheila M. and Carol A. Darling. "Understanding the Strenghts of African-American Families." *Journal of Black Studies* 23.4 (1993), 460–471.

"Information Resources on African-American Studies" (http://www-sul.stanford.edu/depts/ssrg/adams/shortcu/afampp. html).

No Name Woman

Maxine Hong Kingston

Born in 1940 to recently arrived immigrants from China, Maxine Hong Kingston grew up having to negotiate between two very different cultures. Her gender in a culture that valued males over females created further difficulties. These two issues are the main themes that inform much of Hong Kingston's work, most notably The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts *(1975), a collection of autobiographical narrative essays through which she seeks to understand her female ancestors and the ways they helped to form her own identity. "No Name Woman" is from this collection. The most well-known of her other books are* China Men *(1980), a collection of character sketches from real and legendary sources; and* Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book *(1989), a novel. She has received more than 20 awards, fellowships, and honorary degrees, including a National Book Critics Circle Award for* The Woman Warrior, *an American Book Award for* China Men, *and a PEN West Award in Fiction for* Tripmaster Monkey.

In "No Name Woman," Kingston explores the world from which her family emigrated, concentrating on the tragedy of an aunt who, perhaps through no fault of her own, became the object of fear and violence. The scene is a small Chinese village in 1924, a setting so impoverished and precarious that "extravagance" of any kind brings swift punishment. But the fabric of this piece is even richer and more complex than the tragedy of one woman might suggest, for, as Kingston narrates this event in her family's history, she interweaves, seamlessly, concerns and questions about her own identity as a woman of Chinese descent in contemporary, urban America.

"You must not tell anyone," my mother said, "what I am about to tell you. 1
In China your father had a sister who killed herself. She jumped into the family well. We say that your father has all brothers because it is as if she had never been born.

"In 1924 just a few days after our village celebrated seventeen hurry- 2
up weddings—to make sure that every young man who went 'out on the road' would responsibly come home—your father and his brothers and your grandfather and his brothers and your aunt's new husband sailed for America, the Gold Mountain. It was your grandfather's last trip. Those lucky enough to get contracts waved goodbye from the decks. They fed