

## Story of Self: “Phenomenal Woman” by Maya Angelou

**What is this?** A poem from Angelou’s poetry collection *And Still I Rise* (1978).

**Text:**

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.

## Part 1: Analysis

Read through the story of self above and then answer the questions below.

**Text:** “Phenomenal Woman” by Maya Angelou



1. What aspect of **selfhood** is this writer focusing on?

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2. What are the **moments** or **events** they focus on in relation to that aspect of selfhood?

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3. What is the **tone** of this piece? Or, how does this writer **feel** about the aspect of selfhood they are writing about?

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4. What **details** and **images** they use to communicate that tone/feeling?

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5. What are **three words** you would use to describe this writer, based on this piece of writing? What can you tell about their personality, values, or passions?

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## Part 2: Write-alike

A write-alike is an exercise in which you take inspiration from the format, structure, and themes of a piece of writing, but replace the original content with your own.

### The Original:

“Phenomenal Woman” is a free-verse poem about how the speaker interprets and lives her gender identity.

### Questions To Think About For Your Write-alike:

- What is an identity that you possess that is really important to you? If someone asked you “Who (or what) are you?” what would be the first thing you might say?
- What does that identity mean to you? What specific things about being someone with that identity do you take the most pride and pleasure in?

### Starters For Your Write-alike:

You might start by imitating Angelou’s repeating line, “Phenomenal woman, that’s me.”

You could write, “Phenomenal \_\_\_\_\_, that’s me,” and replace “woman” with the identity you’ve chosen to focus on.

Then continue describing what being someone with this identity means to you.

### Examples:

To find examples for this exercise, visit [www.storiesofselfworkshop.com/writing\\_samples.html](http://www.storiesofselfworkshop.com/writing_samples.html)

- Maria’s “Phenomenal Woman” write-alike

### Your Turn:

Set a timer for 15 minutes and go!



A large rectangular area containing horizontal lines for writing, spanning most of the page's width and height.