



Sympathy
Paul Laurence Dunbar

1. I know what the caged bird feels, alas!
When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;
When the wind stirs soft through the
springing grass,
5. And the river flows like a stream of glass;
When the first bird sings and the first bud opes,
And the faint perfume from its chalice steals ---
I know what the caged bird feels!

I know why the caged bird beats his wing
10 Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;
For he must fly back to his perch and cling
When he fain would be on the bough a swing;
And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
And they pulse again with a keener sting ---
15 I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore ---
When he beats his bars and he would be free;
It is not a carol of joy or glee,
But a prayer that he sends from his heart's
20 deep core,
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings ---
I know why the caged bird sings!

(1893)

USE SEPARATE PAPER

1. What is the main theme of the poem?
2. What is the caged bird meant to symbolize?
3. Based on context, what season of the year is it?
4. What simile is used in line 5?
5. What is the bird doing in the 2nd stanza?
6. What is implied in line 13?
7. What does the bird long for in the 3rd stanza?
8. What sort of song his the bird singing in the 3rd stanza?
9. WHY does the caged bird sing?
10. How or why does Dunbar KNOW what the bird sings?
11. Sum up the meaning of this poem – what is it really about?

