



PHOTO COURTESY OF MCT CAMPUS
Maya Angelou has published more than 30 works and is now a professor at Wake Forest University.

Q&A: Maya Angelou on advice and teaching

Maya Angelou has been described as a poet, educator, historian, best-selling author, actress, playwright, producer and director. Angelou will speak at Elon University's annual Fall Convocation 7:30 p.m. Thursday in Alumni Gym. She has published more than 30 works and has earned a number of awards including the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2011 and the Presidential Medal of Arts in 2000. She is currently a Reynolds Professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University.

I understand you are described as a renaissance woman and can classify yourself as a poet, educator, historian, best-selling author, actress, playwright, civil rights activist, producer and director. In your opinion, what is one quality that unifies all these identities?

The one quality I use to identify, not only all my efforts and my labor, but me to you is the statement that I am a human being. That helps me to identify myself not just with the efforts that I make, but it helps me to identify myself with other human beings.

What was the best advice you have ever received?

My grandmother, when I was very young, told me, when you learn, teach and when you get, give. It seemed so simple at the time, but that will take you around the world. My grandmother is an African-American woman in a little village in Arkansas, and she gave me the most profound advice. I thought at the time, 'oh please.' She said it so often, and now I'm beginning to get

it. And that's advice I share willingly with everyone, with my peers and students and those who are superior than me in age, and even in achievement.

To what extent do you attribute this advice to your decision to teach?

Teaching at Wake Forest gives me a steady platform from which I can teach. I have traveled around the world doing the same thing: lecturing, teaching and talking about the movies that I direct or write and the music. All of it. Wake Forest gives me a permanent platform to teach, but the world is my platform too. And yours as well.

What is your most memorable teaching moment?

Years ago I thought God had forgotten my name. I thought I really lost it, and I was going mad, and I went to a voice teacher who is also kind of spiritual in a way, and I told him I was going mad. And he asked me would I write down my blessings. And he gave me a yellow pad and he said to write down that you can hear the sound of your child's cry. Write down that you can see the yellow pad and hold the pen and think of all the people in the world who can't see. By the time I had finished the first page, I was finished with the idea of believing I had been forgotten by the Creator. That was 50 years ago. It's been a long time since you'll hear me complain. I will protest if I don't think it's fair, but I won't complain.

Compiled by Melissa Kansky, News Editor.

ANGELOU TIMELINE

1929

Maya Angelou was born April 4 as Marguerite Ann Johnson in St. Louis, Mo.

1942

At the age of 14, Angelou dropped out of school to become San Francisco's first African-American female cable car conductor.

1954-1955

Angelou toured Europe with the production of the opera "Porgy and Bess."

1960

She moved to Cairo and worked as editor of the English language weekly The Arab Observer.

1961

She moved to Ghana and taught at the University of Ghana's School of Music and Drama, worked as the feature editor for The African Review and wrote for The Ghanaian Times.

1981

She began teaching American Studies at Wake Forest University.

1996

Angelou directed her first feature film, "Down in the Delta."

2008

She was awarded the Lincoln Medal.

1941

As a teenager, Angelou earned a scholarship to study dance and drama at San Francisco's Labor School.

1945

Angelou gave birth to her first son, Guy, at the age of 17.

1957

She recorded her first album.

1958

Angelou moved to New York and joined the Harlem Writers Guild, acted in an Off-Broadway production and wrote and performed "Cabaret for Freedom."

1964

Angelou met Malcolm X and worked with him to Organization for African American Unity.

1970

She published "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," her first of six memoirs.

1993

Angelou composed a poem to read at President Clinton's inauguration ceremony.

2000

She was awarded the Presidential Medal of Arts.

2012

Angelou speaks at Elon University's Fall Convocation.