

UNSEEN POEMS

“PHENOMENAL WOMAN” — MAYA ANGELOU (1928 –)

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies. **1**

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, **5**

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 **10**

Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,

That's me.

I walk into a room

Just as cool as you please, **15**

And to a man,

The fellows stand or

Fall down on their knees.

Then they swarm around me,

A hive of honey bees. **20**

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. **25**

I'm a woman

Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,

That's me.

Men themselves have wondered **30**

what they see in me.

They try so much

But they can't touch

My inner mystery.

When I try to show them, **35**

They say they still can't see.

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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.	40
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.	45
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.	50
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① QUESTIONS

1. Describe, in your own words, the intentions of the poet. (3)

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2. Describe the rhyme scheme and comment on how it serves to emphasise the main themes of the poem. (2)

3. How would you describe the rhythm of this poem? (1)

4. What is the effect of the repetition of the words 'I say' in each stanza? (3)

5. Explain how Angelou makes use of the image of a feminine body in such a way that subverts the reader's expectations. (2)
