**Level 1 Exemplar 1:**

Prompt: Oftentimes, authors write literature to inspire their readers. In a well-developed essay, analyze how authors, Bryan Stevenson and Maya Angelou, create a **mood** that inspires their readers to act.

Authors write for many reasons, including to inspire their readers. Throughout the course of history, many authors have written literature to give a voice to the voiceless and power to the powerless. In the novel excerpt from Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson and the poem Caged Bird by Maya Angelou, both authors use their literature to draw attention to people whose stories need to be told, creating moods of both empathy and hope that inspire their readers to act.

In the novel, Just Mercy, Stevenson tells the story of those on death row who have been wrongly imprisoned and his fight to get them the justice they deserve. In the excerpt from Just Mercy, Stevenson uses the character, Henry, and his diction to create a mood that inspires readers to feel an urgency to act. During Stevenson’s first few weeks during his internship at SPDC he is given the job of going to Georgia’s death row and meeting with Henry to tell him that he will not be executed in the next year. Filled with overwhelming relief at the end of their meeting, as Henry leaves, he burst into song, “I’m pressing on, the upward way”. Despite his circumstances, Henry’s diction shows he still has hope and refuses to let his current situation stop him from ‘moving forward’. Stevenson, deeply moved, reflects that in that exact moment, “Henry altered something in my understanding of human potential, redemption, and hopefulness”. It is easy to believe that those on death row, wrongly convicted, would lose all hope, but Stevenson’s diction provides readers with an image of a man who is still hopeful, despite his circumstances. Stevenson’s response to Henry evokes a realization in the reader – that if even condemned men aspire for better, and maintain hope, they all deserve a better chance at justice than they currently receive. Both Henry and Stevenson’s diction inspire a mood of empathy and hopefulness that motives readers to want to act to find justice for those who do not have it.

In the poem, Caged Bird, Maya Angelou writes about two birds, one free and one caged, and the different lives they live. Similar to Stevenson, Angelou uses her characters and her diction to create an inspirational mood for readers. Birds are known for being free and traveling wherever they want and living a life where they appear to be happy. The free bird in her poem lives a typical bird life, “leaps on the back of the wind… dares to claim the sky” (Angelou). However, the caged bird “stalks down his narrow cage… his wings are clipped and his feet are tied” (Angelou), and he sings “with fearful trill” as it looks out at the free bird. Through the character of the caged bird, Angelou provides an image of a character who readers feel sympathy for due to his circumstances. The image of the caged bird looking out at the free bird causes readers to desire to help that caged bird; so that it too can be free. It is also apparent that Angelou’s, “caged bird,” in this poem symbolizes people who are stuck in metaphorical cages that represent the obstacles that they face. Angelou’s diction also adds to the mood of the poem as well; as she chooses words in the text that assist in creating a mood that is downtrodden and evokes empathy, but also one of hope as Angelou ends the poem with “for the caged bird sings of freedom” (Angelou).

In order to create change in the world, people must feel an urgent need for change. Authors often provide a driving force towards change through their literature, and Bryan Stevenson and Maya Angelou use empathy and hope to inspire others to make changes. In the excerpt from Just Mercy and Caged Bird both authors use their characters and diction to create a this mood that inspires their readers to act.

**Level 1 Exemplar 2:**

Prompt: Oftentimes, authors write literature to inspire their readers to act. In a well-developed essay, analyze how authors, Bryan Stevenson and Maya Angelou, create **moods** that inspire their readers to act.

Authors have the ability to open the eyes of their readers, and help them see the world in new ways. Throughout the course of history, many authors have used this skill to give a voice to the voiceless and power to the powerless. In the novel excerpt from Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson and the poem Caged Bird by Maya Angelou, both authors use imagery and diction purposefully to create moods that disturb and inspire action, in different ways.

In both the excerpt and the poem, the mood is largely disturbing. Through diction, Stevenson creates a tense and halting mood. He uses the same word ‘no’ repeatedly, as he deliberates on what he will say when he meets Henry, a man on death row. When they part ways, Stevenson says, “ I'm really sorry. I'm really sor—" His sentences are often choppy, repetitive and unfinished, often getting cut off in his mind and when he actually speaks. The imagery strengthens this mood as he sees “barbed wire” around the prison, hears a loud metal door slam, is led to a small room, sees the prisoner in shackles and hears “clanging of chains” when Henry is brought to meet him. Likewise, the poem uses diction such as “stalks down his narrow cage” with tied feet and “bars of rage” that are not easy to see through. Contrasted against the free bird, these images unsettle and evoke a sense of felt empathy.

While both disturb, the diction and imagery in both also offer a sense of hope. This man on death row, Henry, shows a surprising positive reaction to Bryan Stevenson’s news, he exhales, exclaiming, “You are the first person I've met in over two years after coming to death row who is not another death row prisoner or a death row guard.” Astonished, Bryan relaxes and notes how they even “laughed at times”. Time passed so quickly that when he “looked at [his] watch”, he realized how time had flown. As the guard led the man out, Henry broke into song that was filled with uplifting images, “I’m pressing on, the upward way / New heights I’m gaining, every day”, creating an opposite mood, and one of uplift in contrast to the chains and barbed wire. In the same way, the poem also offers an uplifting contrast as it depicts the free bird through imagery such as “A free bird leaps on the back of the wind”, floating and claiming the sky. These images create a stark contrast that heightens the emotional impact of the images of the caged bird. A reader can almost feel the experience of freedom when reading about the free bird, then is riveted back to a tense feeling again through the diction and imagery used to describe the caged bird.

Both the jail scene and the bird poem leave the reader feeling unsettled and restless. They imagery and diction create an impact that motives readers to want to act and find justice for those who do not have it.

In order to create change in the world, people must see, and feel, the needs for life to be otherwise. Bryan Stevenson and Maya Angelou are two authors who are currently inspiring others through their literature to make changes. In the excerpt from Just Mercy and Caged Bird both authors use imagery and diction to create a mood that inspires their readers to care, and to act.