

26 Fairmount Avenue Study Guide

26 Fairmount Avenue by Tomie dePaola

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Plot Summary

26 Fairmount Avenue by Tomie dePaola centers on the author's memory of his childhood in Meriden, Connecticut during the late 1930s. When the story begins, the town of Meriden is about to experience its first hurricane ever and the air is thick with anticipation and uncertainty. At the same time, the dePaola family has just begun construction of a brand new house across town. Young Tomie is just four years old in 1938 and he lives in an apartment with his parents and older brother, Buddy. The dePaolas live in a close-knit neighborhood where everyone knows everyone else. Tomie comes from a very large extended Irish-Italian family and during the course of the story Tomie introduces the reader to his colorful, interesting relatives.

After the hurricane hits, Tomie measures the time leading up to moving into the new house in terms of holidays and landmark episodes in his life. One such episode is Tomie's experience at the Capitol Theater in Meriden where he, his mother and Buddy go to see Mr. Walt Disney's animated feature *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Seeing the movie is one of the high points in Tomie's life at the time and he learns an important lesson in acceptance when he realizes that Mr. Disney's movie is not what Tomie expects it to be. Tomie loves going to the movies and he is a big fan of Shirley Temple and Miss Mae West — two of the biggest names in entertainment. Tomie is interested in his world of words and pictures and expresses an interest in becoming an artist when he grows up. With the passage of Christmas, New Year's Eve and Easter, Tomie and his family live and love right up to the day when the new home is really theirs.

Tomie enjoys lively relationships with his great-grandmother, Nana Upstairs, and his Irish grandfather, who Tomie simply refers to as Tom. Each member of the dePaola family is special in his or her own right and Tomie comes to understand the value of belonging to a warm and supportive community of people who genuinely care for one another and help when help is needed.

In this humorous look back, Tomie dePaola can barely contain his excitement about his family's new home. Before moving in, however, there are muddy roads to deal with, a hilarious episode on Tomie's first day of kindergarten and a backyard blaze that almost burns the family's dream to the ground. Through it all, the reader witnesses the dePaola family's ups and downs as well as their love for one another. From being tied to a chair to mysterious chocolates wrapped in silvery paper to the dubious "backyard project," readers will truly enjoy the heartwarming journey that ends at 26 Fairmount Avenue.



Chapters 1 and 2

Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

26 Fairmount Avenue is the story of Tomie dePaola and his family. Tomie has an older brother named Buddy and a large extended family which includes three grandmothers. His family is building a new house in the town of Meriden, Connecticut and Tomie cannot wait to move in. Tomie is four years old when the story begins and he will soon be starting kindergarten.

In Chapter 1, Tomie, his mother and father and brother Buddy all live in an apartment on Columbus Avenue. Tomie is excited about the new house on Fairmount Avenue. In 1938, a hurricane hits Meriden. Everyone is especially scared because hurricanes are very rare in the northeastern United States. Also, in 1938, the dePaolas are building their first (and only) house on Fairmount Avenue.

Tomie and his mother drive to the school. Since there is a hurricane coming, everyone is being sent home early. Tomie's mother Floss and Tomie pick up Buddy from school along with several other children from the neighborhood. One of the children is Carol Crane, Tomie's best friend. Everyone is frightened, including Carol's mother, Mrs. Crane. Tomie's mother sprinkles everyone with Catholic Holy Water. From the windows, Tomie and the others watch as the hurricane blows through town. They see lawn furniture, garbage cans and tree limbs being tossed about by the strong winds. Everybody in the neighborhood loses electricity. Tomie says he will never forget 1938.

In Chapter 2, Tomie talks about the new house his family is building. Tomie explains that the first step in building the house is the digging of the foundation. After this, the cellar is covered over with wooden boards which will make the floor of the house.

Next, boards called "studs" are put up. These "studs" are what will eventually help form the walls of the new house at 26 Fairmount Avenue. Tomie says that when the hurricane hit, the house was not finished. Otherwise, the whole thing might have been blown down. All of Tomie's relatives are excited about the new house.

Tomie dePaola is Irish on his mother's side and Italian on his father's side.

Tomie has two grandmothers, one great-grandmother and a grandfather. His Irish grandfather's name is Tom. Since all of Tomie's grandmothers are called "Nana," Tomie has a hard time telling them apart, so he names his grandmothers according to where they live. Nana Upstairs (Tomie's great-grandmother) lives upstairs in her house in Wallingford, Connecticut. Nana Downstairs lives downstairs in the same house. His grandmother Nana Fall River lives in Fall River, Massachusetts.

Tomie spends every Sunday with Nana Upstairs. He loves Nana Upstairs and they always have a wonderful time together. Tomie usually finds sweets in Nana Upstairs' sewing box. One day, when Tomie does not find any candy in the sewing box, he looks



through the medicine cabinet in the bathroom until he discovers some chocolates wrapped in silver paper.

Tomie and Nana Upstairs eat all the chocolates before realizing that the chocolates are really laxatives! From then on, Nana Downstairs makes sure that there are always sweets in the sewing box.

Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

In Chapter 1, the author introduces the reader to Tomie dePaola and his immediate family. When the story begins, Tomie is four years old and his brother Buddy is eight years old. Carol Crane, Tomie's best childhood friend and her mother are also introduced into the narrative. The excitement builds as the citizens of Meriden, Connecticut await the arrival of the town's first hurricane. This is especially important because hurricanes are very rare in the northeastern United States. Tomie's love of film is also brought to light as he remembers that the hurricane reminds him of scenes from the famous film *The Wizard of Oz*.

The most thrilling thing in Tomie's life at the time is the new house his family is building on Fairmount Avenue. Tomie explains the early stages of home construction.

In the second chapter, Tomie explains the intricacies of naming his grandmothers. Since they are all named Nana, Tomie comes up with a creative way of telling them all apart. In this chapter, it also established that Tomie is very aware of his family's cultural history. Being half Irish and half Italian is something special to Tomie. The character's knowledge of geography as it relates to family is also established. Tomie's sense of himself as a member of a large family is firmly grounded in specific places.



Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

Tomie dePaola loves to go to the movies. In Chapter 3, Tomie goes to the Capitol Theater with his mother and Buddy to see Mr. Walt Disney's animated film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Tomie's two favorite movie stars are Shirley Temple and Miss Mae West, who Tomie says is "all shiny and glittery" (17).

Tomie is thrilled to see *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* on the big screen. After the movie begins, though, Tomie notices that Mr. Walt Disney's movie is different from the storybook *Snow White* which his mother has read to him many times.

At one point, Tomie's brother Buddy becomes afraid and Tomie's mother takes Buddy to the lobby while Tomie finishes watching the movie alone. When Tomie spots another difference between the storybook and the movie, Tomie stands up and shouts at the screen. A woman sitting behind Tomie tells him to sit down and be quiet. When the movie ends, Tomie stands up and yells at the screen again, "Mr. Walt Disney didn't read the story right!" (23). Later, when Tomie goes to see *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* with his best friend Carol Crane, he warns her that the book and the movie are very different.

Chapter 4 begins just after Christmas in 1938. Joe and Floss dePaola fire the man they hired to build the house at 26 Fairmount Avenue. The house sits unfinished all through the winter.

At Easter, Tomie's father tells the family that Mr. Johnny Papallo and Mr. Tony Nesci will help him finish the new house. Tomie and the rest of the family are all happy about this news.

In order to make way for telephone poles and streetlights on Fairmount Avenue, the City of Meriden moves out lots of dirt. This lowers the street so that number 26 now sits up on a hill. Tomie's parents are not happy about this. Joe dePaola says lots of bad words and Tomie's mother begins to cry. The dePaolas discover that a wall will have to be built to keep their new front yard from "falling into the street" (26). Also, a driveway will have to be built, as well as a long walkway leading up to their new house.

In no time at all, the new roof is on and the inside walls go up. Mr. Papallo gives Tomie a piece of blue chalk and Tomie draws pictures of all his relatives on the walls before the plasters begin their work.

The stairs have not been put into the new house yet so Tomie and his family cannot go up to their bedrooms.



Tomie becomes angry when the plasterers cover up all of his drawings. Tomie's grandfather, Tom, tells Tomie not to worry about it. Tom says that the drawings will always be there underneath the plaster and wallpaper.

Tomie's dad decides to wait until fall to begin what he calls "the backyard project" (30). According to Tomie's father, the backyard is full of weeds and tall grass that will have to be cut down and smoothed out before grass can be planted.

Tomie says that every time the City removes more dirt from the street, the house goes higher up in the air. Whenever the house goes up higher, Tomie's mother cries and Tomie's dad uses even more bad words.

Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

In Chapter 3, the reader learns that Tomie is very interested in the movie stars of the day. Shirley Temple and (Miss) Mae West are two of his favorites. Shirley Temple is one of the most famous iconic figures in American entertainment. And while Mae West appealed primarily to adult viewers at that time, it is especially endearing that Tomie dePaola also noticed West's enduring star quality.

Tomie's love of movies is also apparent, as shown in the episode in which he sees *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* for the first time. The character's disappointment with Walt Disney's rendition of the classic fairy story is short-lived but hilarious, nonetheless. His attitude toward the discrepancies of the animated feature proves that Tomie is a discerning viewer. It also speaks to a child's expectation that books and movies should mirror one another.

Tomie marks time by way of major holidays. When Christmas of 1938 comes, the family's plan to move forward with the construction of their new house stalls. However, by the following Easter, the construction resumes. In Chapter 4, Tomie learns something about helpful neighbors when Mr. Papallo and Mr. Nesci agree to help Joe dePaola finish building the family's new home. When the City begins removing dirt from Fairmount Avenue, Tomie learns about adapting to circumstance. Tomie's mother's tears and his father's use of bad words are reactions that are familiar to Tomie.

When Mr. Papallo gives Tomie the blue chalk, Tomie draws pictures of his family on the walls. Tomie dePaola understands the idea of inclusion and the pictures are his way of sharing his excitement with the entire family — even the ones who live far away.



Chapters 5 and 6

Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

Chapter 5 begins in the fall of 1939, and Tomie dePaola is about to start kindergarten. Tomie is excited about going to school because he is anxious to learn how to read. Tomie is also a little disappointed that his family has not moved into the new house at 26 Fairmount Avenue yet.

On the first day of school, Tomie tells his mother that he wants to walk to school alone. The school is just down the street from their apartment on Columbus Avenue. Tomie walks through the front door of the school by accident. Tomie meets Miss Burke (the principal) on the first day of school.

When Tomie meets his Kindergarten teacher for the first time, he asks her when they will begin learning to read. The teacher tells Tomie that he will learn to read when he reaches the first grade — one year away. Tomie tells the teacher, "I'll be back next year," and walks back home. No one is home when Tomie arrives. The school notifies Tomie's parents that he has gone home and his parents meet him at the apartment a short time later.

Floss dePaola tells Tomie that in order to get to the first grade, Tomie must finish kindergarten first. Tomie is not too happy to hear this, but he returns to kindergarten anyway.

In Chapter 6, the backyard project finally begins! First, Tomie's father Joe decides that all the weeds and grasses will have to be burned. The neighbors all help and soon the fire is lit. All the grown-ups use brooms and burlap bags to contain the fire so that it does not spread and burn down the new house. At first, everyone keeps the flames so low that the fire actually goes out. After awhile, though, the fire begins burning really well. Soon, however, people's eyes are irritated by the smoke and the fire almost gets out of hand.

Tomie's mother grabs a garden hose and puts out the flames. She sprays down the new house and all the people gathered in their new backyard.

After the backyard grasses and weeds are all burned, Tomie's father hires a man with a horse to plow the backyard. Tomie's father collects the rocks found in the backyard and decides to use the rocks to build the wall which will go in front of the new house. When the yard is plowed, the man and his horse smooth out the ground with something Tomie calls a "contraption" and the backyard project is complete (41).



Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

Tomie's first day of kindergarten and his reaction to not being taught to read (yet) establish the character as someone who is eager to learn. After his mother convinces Tomie to return to kindergarten, Tomie shows maturity and commitment. His goal is to learn to read and Tomie is willing to brave an entire year of kindergarten to do so.

The backyard incident in Chapter 6 once again reinforces the idea of community when everyone in the neighborhood helps burn the grass and weeds behind the new house at 26 Fairmount Avenue. This chapter also works to increase the characters' level of tension. After a close call, the family is able to continue with the construction.

The use of the "contraption" in Chapter 6 introduces the reader to something that is fairly uncommon today. The old Italian man Joe dePaola hires to smooth out the backyard uses a horse to help him complete the work. This tells the reader that the area in which the dePaola's new house is built is fairly rural. Tomie dePaola's childhood must have been an exciting time. A new house in a new neighborhood lends to a feeling of possibility for Tomie and his family.

Chapters 7, 8, and 9

Chapters 7, 8, and 9 Summary

At the beginning of Chapter 7, it begins to rain and rain. Tomie's father calls the storm a "nor'easter" (42). Tomie rides with his mother to take Buddy, Carol Crane and some other children to school that morning. Then Tomie and his mother drive over to Fairmount Avenue to check on the new house. When they arrive, they see that the new, smooth backyard has become a muddy mess. After visiting the new house, Tomie's father tells the family that only a little muddy water went into the cellar. His father also says that the City will have to "redo the whole street" because the rain has made a mess of it (44). This time, Floss dePaola does not cry and his father does not say any bad words.

Once again, Tomie realizes that it will be even longer before he can move into the new house. Tomie's great-aunt Nell tells him that if he asks his guardian angel for something good, he will probably get it, so Tomie asks his guardian angel to come to the rescue. The muddy mess in the backyard freezes over and within a week, people are back working on the dePaola's new home.

The inside stairs are soon built and Tomie and his family can go upstairs and look at the bedrooms. Tomie even goes into the cellar to have a look around. Mr. dePaola tells Buddy and Tomie that they will move into 26 Fairmount Avenue "right after New Year's Eve" (45).

In Chapter 8, the dePaolas celebrate their last Christmas in the apartment on Columbus Avenue. Tomie has a fantastic Christmas! Santa Claus brings him an Uncle Wiggly game, a harmonica and a Jeep doll just like the one in the Popeye comics. Buddy gets a catcher's mitt and a softball and Tomie's friend Carol Crane gets an "authentic Shirley Temple doll" (47).

When New Year's Eve arrives, Tomie, Buddy and Carol all have their own party. Tomie's parents, Mr. and Mrs Crane and Tomie's Uncle Charles and his girlfriend, Viva, get all dressed up and go to the Elks Club for a dance. Mrs. dePaola leaves Tomie and the other kids delicious brownies and Mrs. Crane provides the party hats and noisemakers. Tomie is really looking forward to New Year's Eve because it means that the family will soon be moving into the new house at 26 Fairmount Avenue.

In Chapter 9, the time finally comes for the dePaola family to move into their brand new home. Tomie says, "Everything was crazy" (52). Tomie and Buddy ride down to Wallingford with Uncle Charles so as not to be in the way.

Tomie helps grandfather Tom stock the shelves at Tom and Nana's grocery store to pass the time but Tomie is beside himself with anticipation about the move.



Uncle Charles tells Tomie and Buddy that after supper they will go to the new house. When Tomie's parents call, it is already dark outside. Uncle Charles, Viva and Mickey Lynch take the boys to 26 Fairmount Avenue.

When Tomie, Buddy and the others arrive at the house, Tomie rings the doorbell and his mom and dad answer the door and say, "Welcome home" (57).

Tomie runs in and rushes right upstairs to his and Buddy's new bedroom. He sees two new beds, two brand new dressers and a mirror that looks just like a ship's wheel hanging on the wall.

Tomie is overjoyed to finally be living at 26 Fairmount Avenue. Tomie knows that this is just the beginning of his own story.

Chapters 7, 8, and 9 Analysis

The final three chapters of the narrative bring the journey "home" full circle but not without incident. By this time, Tomie has settled into kindergarten and is well on his way to learning to read.

The progression of time is marked by Tomie's father's statement that the family will move into the house at 26 Fairmount Avenue "right after New Year's Eve" (45). Tomie's celebration party is another look back at a long-ago time. The children enjoy snacks and games while their parents attend a dance. This is nothing unusual, though. What grounds the story in the late 1930s is the fact that Tomie, Buddy, and the others listen to the festivities on the radio. Since television had not yet been introduced into people's homes, the radio was an important device back then. Young readers might find this somewhat startling. In Tomie dePaola's day, there were no DVDs or CDs and no internet. Life was simpler and slower then, but certainly no less exciting.

The gifts that Tomie, Buddy and Carol receive for Christmas reflect the things that were important to children at the time. Adults today will understand that the Jeep doll Tomie receives is an early example of product placement, given that the Jeep doll is a character in the Popeye cartoons. Children today are much the same as Tomie. They often ask for toys that were originally introduced as fictional characters in movies or television.

When it is finally time for the dePaola family to move into their brand new home, Tomie and the others are more than ready to start their lives again. Through the hurricane, the torrential rains, the house ending up on a hill, the almost-fire in the backyard, two Christmases and an Easter the family stays closely connected to one another and to their community.

Also, the reader learns that this book is just the beginning of the story of Tomie dePaola and his big, happy family.



Characters

Tomie dePaola

Tomie dePaola is the main character in *26 Fairmount Avenue*. Tomie was born in 1934. At the time the story takes place, Tomie lives with his older brother Joseph ("Buddy"), his mother Florence ("Floss"), and his father Joe in an apartment on Columbus Avenue in Meriden, Connecticut. Eventually, Tomie will have two younger sisters named Maureen and Judie. Tomie dePaola is Irish on his mother's side and Italian on his father's side. Tomie comes from a large extended family, which includes three grandmothers. On his mother's side, Tomie is related to the famous Irish tenor Morton Downey. Tomie enjoys going to the movies with his mother and wants to be an artist when he grows up. His two favorite movie stars are Shirley Temple and Miss Mae West. Tomie always calls grown-ups "Mr.", "Mrs.", or "Miss." Tomie's best friend is Carol Crane. Tomie is a bright, independent young fellow with a good sense of humor, but he does not enjoy kindergarten very much. Tomie learns a lesson in patience while he waits for the family's new house to be built. Tomie dePaola sees the adventure in everything.

Florence (Floss) dePaola

Floss dePaola is the mother of Tomie and Buddy dePaola and Joe dePaola's wife. Floss's cousin is the talented Irish tenor Morton Downey. Floss is Catholic and she often sprinkles Mrs. Crane (and the others) with Holy Water. Floss's mother is Nana Downstairs and her grandmother is Nana upstairs. Floss dePaola also cries quite a bit. It is Floss who takes Tomie to see movies and cartoons at the Capitol Theater in Meriden, Connecticut. Floss is a stay-at-home mom. It is Floss dePaola who convinces Tomie to return to kindergarten after he finds out that he will not be learning to read until first grade.

Joseph (Joe) dePaola

Joe dePaola is the father of Tomie and Buddy dePaola. He is Florence dePaola's husband. Joe dePaola is Italian-American. When he is upset, Joe often says bad words. Joe dePaola loves his family very much and after he fires the builder, Joe and his friends finish building the new house at 26 Fairmount Avenue. Joe dePaola works at a barbershop.

Joseph (Buddy) dePaola, Jr.

Buddy is Tomie dePaola's older brother. Buddy and his brother are also very good friends. Buddy becomes frightened when he, Tomie and Floss go to the Capitol Theater to see Mr. Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Buddy loves to play



softball and he receives a catcher's mitt and ball for Christmas. Buddy is four years older than Tomie.

Nana Upstairs

Nana Upstairs is Tomie dePaola's great-grandmother on his mother's side. Tomie calls her Nana Upstairs because she lives in the upstairs part of her house. Nana Upstairs is very old and has to be tied to her chair to keep from falling over. Nana Upstairs is Tomie's favorite relative and the two of them spend every Sunday together talking and laughing. Nana Upstairs also eats the chocolate laxatives that Tomie finds in the medicine cabinet. At the time the story takes place, Nana Upstairs is ninety-four years old.

Nana Downstairs

Nana Downstairs is Floss dePaola's mother and Tomie and Buddy's grandmother. Nana Downstairs is the daughter of Nana Upstairs. Nana Downstairs is married to Tomie's grandfather Tom. Nana Downstairs and Tom own a small grocery store. After Tomie and Nana Upstairs accidentally eat the chocolate laxatives, Nana Downstairs remembers to put sweet treats in the sewing box in the hall.

Tom

Tom is Tomie dePaola's grandfather on his mother's side. He is Floss dePaola's father and Nana Downstairs' husband. Tom is Irish. Tom is also a very wise man, who always manages to help Tomie feel better when things do not go Tomie's way.

Carol Crane

Carol Crane is Tomie dePaola's best friend. Carol and her parents live in the same neighborhood as the dePaola's. Carol Crane looks a lot like the child movie star Shirley Temple, except Carol's curls are red. For Christmas, Carol gets a Shirley Temple doll.

Mrs. Crane

Mrs. Crane is Carol Crane's mother and a good friend of Floss dePaola. Mrs. Crane is afraid of lightning and is especially fond of being sprinkled with Holy Water by Mrs. dePaola.



Uncle Charles

Uncle Charles is related to Tomie and Buddy on their mother's side. Uncle Charles has a girlfriend named Viva. His best friend is Mickey Lynch.

Nana Fall River

Nana Fall River is Tomie's grandmother on his father's side. Nana Fall River is Italian. She lives in the town of Fall River, Massachusetts.

Miss Burke

Miss Burke is the principal at Tomie and Buddy's neighborhood school. On his first day of kindergarten, Miss Burke reminds Tomie not to enter the school through the front door. Tomie says that he gets to know Miss Burke really well over the years.



Objects/Places

Meriden

Meriden is a small town in the state of Connecticut.

Fall River

Fall River is a town in the state of Massachusetts.

New England

New England is a region in the northeastern United States. Maine, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Vermont are the New England states.

The Wizard of Oz

The Wizard of Oz is a fantasy story about a girl named Dorothy who lives in Kansas.

Holy Water

Holy Water is water that has been blessed by a Catholic priest. Holy Water is used to bless and protect people from harm.

Huntsman

A huntsman is a person who hunts animals for a living.

Hemlock

Hemlock is a kind of poisonous tree.

Cottage

A cottage is a small house.



Burlap

Burlap is a kind of cloth made from jute fibers.

Manger

A manger is a kind of box or trough used for feeding animals.



Themes

A Loving Family

Tomie dePaola has a large family. And it seems as though he has a special relationship with each and every relative mentioned in the narrative. It is obvious that he is close to his mother, father, and brother. What is especially endearing about Tomie, though, is his connection to Nana Upstairs and his Irish grandfather, Tom. Tomie has a solid understanding of who his relatives are and their connection to him as a member of a big family. Tomie appreciates the older members of his family as people who not only provide him with hours of entertainment, but people who actually contribute to the overall quality of his life. For example, he says in Chapter 2 that, "Nana Upstairs was a special person to me [...] and every Sunday I spent all my time with her" (12).

Tomie listens to the adults in his family, he takes them seriously and he respects them. His Irish grandfather comforts Tomie after the plasterers cover up his drawings on the walls of the new house by reminding his grandson that the pictures will always be there. Tomie says, "Tom always made me feel better" (30). It is important to recognize that the dePaola family is not divided in terms of generation — they all contribute something special to young Tomie's life. His relationships with the adults around him gives Tomie confidence and a deep sense of trust and security.

Tomie's family provides a strong foundation for him as a child. He grows up as an independent thinker and an effective self-manager. He is allowed to share in his parents' enthusiasm and their disappointments without being coddled or sheltered from things which might be unpleasant. Throughout the story, Tomie is engaged, interested and given a place to express his feelings without judgment or blame.

The Silver Screen

It is clear that young Tomie dePaola is fascinated with the movies. It is also impressive that Tomie should be so in tune with the happenings of the day at such an early age. When he watches Walt Disney's full-length animated feature *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* for the first time, Tomie recognizes that there are major differences between the storybook version and the cinematic version. This episode represents Tomie's first exposure to cinematic adaptation and its shortcomings. Tomie knows the *Snow White* story by heart and he automatically assumes that Mr. Walt Disney would remain true to the storybook version. Tomie's disappointment is palatable and also very humorous. However, he uses his dismay to his advantage when he reminds Carol Crane of the differences between book and film. His shock at Walt Disney's version of *Snow White* does not dampen Tomie's enthusiasm at all and this is heartening. Tomie learns a valuable lesson about viewership without allowing the experience to sour him on the medium he loves so dearly.



Memory

26 Fairmount Avenue is really a look back at Tomie dePaola's past. As such, the reader is able to relive dePaola's experience during the late 1930s. Life was different in those days, but not so different that certain things would be unrecognizable today. What is most impressive about the story is Tomie's sense of continuity that is conveyed. That is to say, characters in 26 Fairmount Avenue are characters who move into and out of the author's life for years and years. DePaola, who is now in his late 70s, remembers people, places and things from his early childhood in vivid, affectionate detail. Reading Tomie dePaola's story gives the reader a sense of the wonder of childhood, family and love. DePaola remembers things which could be considered "high points" in the author's life. It is worth noting that the episodes recounted in the narrative are neither explosive nor traumatic. Memory, in terms of Tomie dePaola's life, is something sweet and innocent — just the way childhood should be. Tomie's memories are very accessible to young readers because of the simplicity with which the author expresses himself. DePaola's memories of his family are honest and quite endearing and his representations make the reader interested to learn more.



Style

Point of View

The whole chapter book is told from the perspective of Tomie dePaola. At the time the story takes place, Tomie is a very young child. In 1938, he is just four years old. The story of 26 Fairmount Avenue is comprised of Tomie dePaola's memories. It is also good to keep in mind that the book takes place during the first half of the twentieth century when things were very different. By telling the story from the perspective of his younger self, dePaola is able to take the reader back in time to when things were simpler. For example, Tomie dePaola remembers the first time he saw Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. This sense of wonder is what makes the book so entertaining. If dePaola were to recount his adventure from an adult perspective, the story might not appeal to younger readers. Also, because the story is told through young Tomie's eyes, the adults in the story are somewhat in the background. After all, it is Tomie's world that is being presented, not his mother's or his father's. This also makes the story more humorous. That is to say, things like Nana Upstairs being tied to her chair might not be quite so funny told from an adult's point of view.

Setting

The story takes place in and around the community of Meriden, Connecticut. As such, the author mentions places and landmarks well-known to the local people. For instance, at one point Tomie mentions Craig Castle, which is a real landmark in Meriden. Fall River, Massachusetts figures prominently in the narrative because Tomie dePaola has relatives who live there.

Other locations mentioned in the story include Wallingford, Massachusetts and New York City and the Bronx (which is one of the five boroughs of New York City). In addition, Italy and Ireland also figure in the narrative because Tomie's relatives come from these two countries.

Language and Meaning

Because the story is told from the point of a view of a young child, the language and meaning are relatively simple. And although the story itself takes place in the late 1930s, the author uses language that is easily understandable for today's young reader. Tomie says that Buddy "freaked out" at the movies, which is a modern term (20). At the same time, though, there are words and phrases which are no longer used or easily recognized by young readers in the U.S. For example, Tomie mentions that at the movies his mother buys Black Crows as a treat. Black Crows are small licorice candies which were very popular during the first half of the twentieth century. In addition, Tomie says that adults might call him and his brother Buddy "fashion plates" when they are all dressed up in their new Easter outfits (25).



Other words and phrases Tomie uses in the narrative also represent the 1930s. Tomie and the other children listen to the radio rather than watching television, which had not yet been introduced into most American homes at the time. Tomie mentions *The Wizard of Oz*, Shirley Temple, Morton Downey and Mae West — all of which are easily recognizable as emblematic of the 1930s.

The words and terms Tomie uses in his description of the process of constructing the family's new house are still relevant today. He mentions two-by-fours, cement mixers, studs and concrete.

Structure

26 Fairmount Avenue is fifty-seven pages long. The book is divided into nine chapters, each averaging approximately six pages in length. None of the nine chapters in this narrative have titles. The narrative progresses in a linear fashion, with one episode leading directly into the next. There is no specific narrative arc in this story, as the culminating event is the dePaolas moving into their newly-constructed house across town. The narrative comes full circle in that Chapter 1 begins with Tomie dePaola's recollection of his excitement over moving into the new house, while Chapter 9 brings resolution of that excitement. Also, it is important to remember that 26 Fairmount Avenue is the beginning of a series of books which cover several years of Tomie dePaola's life. To this end, the author does mention that moving into 26 Fairmount Avenue is only the beginning of the series. For example, Tomie mentions in Chapter 4 that he will have two sisters sometime in the future. Furthermore, at the very end of the book, under the words "The End" Tomie writes ("for the time being").



Quotes

"I guess [Mrs. Crane] thought that Catholic Holy Water was better than nothing, and it must have worked because Mrs. Crane never got struck by lightning" (Chapter 1, page 5).

"[Miss Mae West] didn't dance, but she was all shiny and glittery and all she had to do was walk and talk and everyone in the movie theater laughed and laughed " (Chapter 3, page 17).

"Mirror, Mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all? (Chapter 3, page 19).

"[Buddy and I] were certainly what grown-ups call 'fashion plates'" (Chapter 4, page 25).

"[...] I went back to school, but I never really liked kindergarten" (Chapter 5, page 36).

"What used to be the newly plowed backyard was roaring down in two muddy streams on either side of the house into the street" (Chapter 7, page 43).

"Aunt Nell told me that if you wanted something really important, you could ask your guardian angel, and as long as it wasn't a bad thing, you'd probably get it" (Chapter 7, page 45).

"[Carol Crane's Shirley Temple doll] was so big and looked so real, I expected it to sing and dance" (Chapter 8, page 47).

"On New Year's Eve, my mom and dad got all dressed up like movie stars" (Chapter 9, page 48).

"There on the wall beside the door was a black metal cutout of a tree branch with the silhouette of a squirrel sitting on it. At the end of the branch was the number 26" (Chapter 9, page 55).



Topics for Discussion

What happens on Tomie's first day of kindergarten?

Why does Mrs. Crane always want to be sprinkled with Catholic Holy Water?

Which famous child star does Tomie's friend Carol Crane look like?

What does the old Italian man use to smooth out the dePaola's backyard?

What does Floss dePaola do to keep the new house at 26 Fairmount Avenue from burning down?

How many grandparents does Tomie have? Why does Tomie give them all nicknames?

What happens to the pictures Tomie draws on the walls of the new house?

What kind of treat does Tomie's mother buy him and Buddy at the movies?

How does Tomie react when he sees Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs at the movies for the first time?

What is the backyard project?