

'Tis: A Memoir Study Guide

'Tis: A Memoir by Frank McCourt

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Plot Summary

This is the tale of the life of Frank McCourt, encompassing 36 years as he journeys from Ireland to New York and tries to find his place in the world. The child of an absent father and a mother forced to accept charity for the survival of her family, Frank does not really know what his role in life is. He dreams of a better life in America and, at the age of 19, sails on the Irish Oak to a land of promise and wealth. Once in New York Frank struggles to find his place, working hard at surviving and sending home every spare cent he can to support his mother and younger brothers. Despite the fact that his family and friends in Limerick think he is lucky to be in America, Frank finds it difficult to fit in, always feeling out of place and not quite good enough.

Things change a bit for Frank when he enters the Army during the Korean War. Even though he receives the same training as those around him Frank still feels depressed about his inferiorities, often referring to the 'dark clouds' that cloud his mind as he fights to find some happiness in life. Though it seems odd that someone would try and find happiness during wartime, Frank has been unable to find and hold happiness anywhere, so he continues to try and find it.

After the war Frank is able to talk his way into New York University and while working nights and weekends is able to earn his teaching degree. Getting a job at McKee Vocational and Technical School Frank stills struggles with his insecurities and making his way in the world. Despite marrying his love Alberta and becoming a father to his beloved Maggie, Frank still feels as if he is unworthy of the things he has, and continues to work for the things that he feels will make him whole.

While Frank worries about the failings in his own life, his mother arrives in New York and he is unable to deal with her bitterness at life, something he sometimes mirrors. Angela McCourt's inability to accept goodness in life bothers Frank, as he has the same issues himself. Despite this, Frank does make the effort to understand his mother and her feelings, an effort he continues to make until she passes away, still an unhappy woman who's life was spent struggling to make the lives of her children better.

Frank winds up unable to continue the charade of the happy American life, divorcing his wife after many years together. McCourt continues teaching, trying to bring the joy of learning and the excitement of life to the students in his care. Though Frank goes through life thinking that something is missing, or that he is unworthy of the good things that have come his way, he battles on, longing for the peace that he hopes to find some day.

The novel ends in 1985, 36 years after Frank arrived in New York. Frank has returned to Ireland to bury his father and his mother. Unable to mourn them in what he feels is a proper and respectful way, Frank mourns them for what they could have been, for what they longed to be in their youth, and hopes that he can someday find the happiness that has eluded his parents.



Prologue-Chapter Five

Prologue-Chapter Five Summary and Analysis

In the prologue, Frank McCourt reveals his dream of returning to New York, a dream that he feels belongs to him alone. After being taunted by his siblings and chastised by his mother, Frank realizes that the dream of a better life in America is his to share, rather than keep from other.

In Chapter One, Frank McCourt travels on the MS Irish Oak, a freighter bound for New York. Frank is unsure of himself at the best of time, worried that his bad teeth and red eyes will open him up to the ridicule of others. Almost painfully shy and aware of his lack of social skills, Frank keeps his thoughts to himself and avoids other, preferring to read Crime and Punishment on the deck. He meets Owen, a sailor on the ship and they briefly discuss Dostoyevsky until the priest arrives and tells Frank he should not speak to the likes of Owen, a former officer on the Queen Elizabeth who had been caught in the cabin of a woman passenger. Frank is a bit put off, as he would rather talk to the sailor than the priest, or the Protestants that the priest feels would be good acquaintances to make.

In Chapter Two, the priest tells Frank that he can travel with him from Albany to New York by train, as he has no one to meet him. The priest takes Frank to The Biltmore Hotel where he is given a job cleaning the lobby. The priest also arranges for Frank to stay in the home of Mrs. Austin, renting a room for six dollars a week. The two have dinner at Dempsey's restaurant and the priest becomes drunk, passing out at the table. The waiter calls a cab and Frank helps the man into his room where the priest makes a drunken pass at him. Frank runs, embarrassed for the priest, yet blaming himself as well. Frank gets a call at Mrs. Austin's the next morning from the priest and is told to come get his suitcase. Frank does, still ashamed, and the priest tells him that he is going to Virginia on retreat.

In Chapter Three, Frank stops in Costello's bar and has a drink but his ignorance about certain things annoys the owner, Tim, who sends him to the library and tells him not to come back until he's read The Lives of the English Poets. Frank is barred from the establishment until he's read the book so he sits in bed reading until Mrs. Austin tells him to turn out the light. Tom Clifford, another border suggests they go out for some drinks and head over to the Rhinelander. Tom finds a girl and suggests Frank asks her friend if he can take her home. Frank suggests it, only to be laughed at by the girl who obviously looks down on him. Frank is once again the subject of ridicule, this time real, not imagined, because of his looks and lack of education. This will continue to be an issue for him throughout the novel. '

In Chapter Four, Frank meets with his boss, Mr. Carey and begins his job as a houseman in the Palm Court of the Biltmore. Frank is not allowed to speak to the guests, but simply to clean around them as if he does not exist. Most of the time the



work is easy, but being around the college kids makes him long for the life himself. Seeing the beautiful girls and the handsome young men creates feelings of jealousy for Frank, who wishes that he were as lucky as they are.

In Chapter Five, Frank decides to treat himself to a showing of Hamlet, and sneaks a ginger ale and piece of pie in with him. Trying to eat without disturbing the others Frank heads to the men's room and starts to eat. Trying to open the ginger ale he breaks the bottle and cuts himself just as another man enters. The man steps in Frank's pie and angrily gets the usher who arrives to find the disheveled Frank covered in his own blood. The usher orders Frank from the theater, telling him not to return. Frank leaves, but has nowhere to go but home, once again feeling lost and alone in the city he dreamed of for so long.



Chapters Six-Ten

Chapters Six-Ten Summary and Analysis

In Chapter Six, Frank works as the houseman with his infected eyes, one step above the Puerto Ricans that work in the kitchen. Frank works hard to stay invisible in his job, avoiding the college men and women who he finds attractive the point that he sometimes has to masturbate or 'interfere' with himself for relief. On one afternoon he is called to a table where a young woman cries because Frank has thrown away the phone number of a Princeton man. Ordered to the kitchen to search the trash, Frank gives up in humiliation and writes a fake phone number on a napkin for the girl, only sorry he won't be there when she tries to reach the man she had met.

In Chapter Seven, Frank receives a letter from his mother in Ireland, asking if he can spare more money so that she can get his brother new shoes for Christmas. Frank sends her ten dollars a week as it is, leaving him with ten dollars of his own after he pays the rent, but he feels it is his duty. At work Frank speaks with Eddie Gilligan who has gotten complaints about the redness of Frank's eyes. Frank goes to an eye doctor who tells him the problem is caused by infectious dandruff and he needs to shave his head. He does so, only to be told when he returns to work that he will not be able to work in the lobby until his hair grows back and his eyes are healed, as people will think he is ill.

In Chapter Eight, Frank is working on the nineteenth floor with Eddie Gilligan and his brother Joe, as well as Digger Moon, the carpet layer who claims to be a Blackfoot Indian. The men argue amongst themselves and Mr. Carey, the boss, discussing life and the hardships they have faced. Frank is still learning to live in New York, trying to learn the language differences. The different words used for things sometimes confuse him, such as a torch being called a flashlight in America. When forced to turn the light off by Mrs. Austin, Frank daydreams, visiting Limerick in his mind, enjoying the images he sees.

In Chapter Nine, Mrs. Austin invites Frank to a meal for Christmas with her sister Hannah who is married to a lazy Irishman. Mrs. Austin serves him glug while her sister Hannah berates him for being a worthless Irishman. All three are drunk and Frank winds up throwing up in the vestibule and cleaning it up. Frank tries to attend mass at St. Vincent's but is told that the pew where he sits is reserved. Sadly, Frank heads back home, hungry and tired. Mrs. Austin calls him downstairs and apologizes for her behavior of the night before, offering a Christmas dinner. The two watch TV together and when Frank wakes in the morning he hears Mrs. Austin calling for her dead husband in her sleep. Frank realizes that he is not the only person that is lonely in New York.

In Chapter Ten, the priest returns and takes Frank out to lunch. The priest apologizes to Frank, assuring him that he is returning to Los Angeles where he will work with the poor.

The only thing that Frank has taken away from the entire incident is that he's left to wonder if there are priests all over the world intent on molesting people in hotel rooms.



Chapters 11-15

Chapters 11-15 Summary and Analysis

The Korean War breaks out, and while all around him are giving Frank advice how to stay out of the Army, he keeps the secret that he is thankful for any excuse to be away from the Biltmore Hotel. Frank has basic training at Fort Dix in New Jersey where he continues to struggle with the different beliefs and opinions of those around him. At Fort Dix a corporal name Dunphy shows Frank how to clean his rifle and the result impresses at inspection. Frank is chosen as the colonel's orderly, and will ride around with the colonel while he attends to business.

In Chapter 12, Corporal Sneed orders Frank to pick up a cigarette butt off the ground, and Frank innocently replies that did not drop it, as he does not smoke. The Corporal angrily has Frank dig a hole in the woods and has him bury his three-day pass in the hole. Frank is then assigned to kitchen duty, scrubbing pans. After calling Emer to tell her he will not be home, Frank heads back to his barracks to clean up. Corporal Dunphy arrives and takes Frank out for a beer. Frank compares Dunphy to his own father, and wonders if his father even remembers that it is Frank's 21st birthday.

In Chapter 13, Frank attends Sunday mass with Di Angelo, a fellow soldier. Frank is surprised by Di Angelo's view of the church, that it belongs to everyone and that the priests are just humans. Despite this, Frank still has a fear of God and thinks the sins he has committed in life are unforgivable. The dark clouds of depression and uncertainty that he feels fill his head at times and he wishes he could banish them.

Frank is called to the office of the Master Sergeant and told that Corporal Sneed had no right to take his 3-day pass even though he disobeyed a direct order, and that he can have his pass that weekend.

In Chapter 14, Frank is deployed to Bavaria and assigned to a K-9 unit where his is afraid of his dog. Despite this he works hard, but before the end of training is reassigned to company clerk school. Again the dark clouds of anger and depression beat inside Frank's head. Frank takes the course and is to replace Shemanski as the company clerk. Frank is nervous taking Shemanski's job as clerk but does his best, and after getting drilled all day by the Sergeant. After Shemanski returns from his furlough Frank is reassigned to be in charge of supplies. Shemanski teases Frank and Frank reacts angrily and is brought before the sergeant to be reminded of his place in things. A week later Frank is in trouble again when a soldier teases him about the allotment that is sent home to his mother. Frank attacks the man and is called in again. Luckily the captain is Irish as well and Frank gets off lightly.

In Chapter 15, Frank travels with two other clerks to take the laundry to Munich. They arrive at Dachau, where the laundry is to be done. Rappaport, another clerk is devastated and runs from the truck screaming. Frank walks around looking at the big

ovens used by the German's in World War II. Wondering if it is proper to say a Catholic prayer over a Jewish grave, Frank does so anyway out of respect.

On the way back from Dachau the men stop in a refugee camp. Frank finds himself with a German girl and the two have sex. Ashamed of himself, as the girl lives in the same way he had back in Ireland, Frank gives her all of his cigarettes and coffee.



Chapters 16-20

Chapters 16-20 Summary and Analysis

Frank winds up with the mumps, probably a result of his time spent in the refugee camp. Taken to a military hospital, Frank is pleased when a cart is rolled through with books and he chooses *Crime and Punishment*, hoping to finish it. Reading it reminds him that he stole the money to get to America from his former employer, Mrs. Finucane and that she had been planning to leave it to the church. Trying to get his mind off things Frank remembers the girl in the refugee camp and masturbates. Afterward Frank thinks that the only way he will get into heaven is to be hit by a truck and have a moment to say the perfect Act of Contrition. Frank thinks he might be the perfect Catholic if he could speak to God directly instead of through a priest.

In Chapter 17, Frank is promoted to corporal and given two weeks furlough in Ireland. Excited about his mother's new government housing and the chance to see his brothers, Frank takes the train to meet his mother and immediately gets angry with her because she has not moved into the new house yet. Angela cannot seem to let go of the slums they have lived in all their lives. Frank decides to stay at the National Hotel instead. Outside he sees a group of boys who call out to him, an American soldier, taunting him. Frank recognizes himself in them and hands out change, changing the way they look at him.

Frank goes to the old neighborhood and sees the people he grew up with, all suitably impressed with him in his uniform. At the house Frank sees his mother and her brother, his Uncle Pat. It becomes clear to Frank that his mother has not moved because her brother refuses to. They all have tea and Frank takes a walk with his brother Alphie so that others can admire him in his uniform. They meet up with his brother Michael on his way home from work and head back to the house.

Frank goes to visit his Uncle Pa Keating, a man he admires because his uncle does not care about what anyone thinks. Afterward they head back to the old house and Frank spends the night in his old bed, shared with his brothers. In the morning the family leaves for the new house, after Angela tries one last time to get her brother to move with them. Along the way Angela is morose and Frank grows angry, but once they arrive at the new place Angela sweeps away her sadness. Frank is not able to do so as easily, angry with his mother for clinging to the poverty she has grown up in.

In Chapter 18, Frank attends a dance, hoping to be admired in his uniform. Instead he winds up dancing with a girl that has a limp, becoming the laughingstock of the evening. In the days that follow Frank realizes that he is not the important American Soldier that he had hoped would be admired in Limerick, but just plain Frankie McCourt, known by all. His desire to be admired is strong, and rather than continue trying to impress he puts his uniform away and dresses casually, unwilling to draw any more attention to himself.



A letter arrives from his father's sister, asking Frank to visit and he goes. Malachy McCourt greets Frank and asks about his mother and brothers, then warns him about the bad people that sit in the pubs. Frank has trouble reconciling this sanctimonious man to the one who drank every penny he earned while his family starved in Limerick.

Frank grows angry and leaves abruptly after listening to his aunt and grandmother tell Frank that his father's troubles were really because of his mother and her behavior while he was away. Arriving at home Frank cannot tell his mother why he is back early, for fear of upsetting her. Frank, as always, keeps his thoughts to himself, always trying keep the peace.

In Chapter 19, Frank is sent to the hospital because of the infection in his eyes. The doctor treats him and an orderly names Apollo gives Frank salt to rub in his eyes so that he can stay in the hospital longer in exchange for his rations of cigarettes and coffee. This lasts for a few weeks until Frank is caught and sent back to his unit. Time passes and Frank decides not to re-enlist, anxious to get back to New York and Emer. The night before he leaves there is a party where the officer's wives attend, and one tells Frank that all the woman think he is handsome. Frank is pleased before he realizes that the women are laughing at him, something he has sadly grown accustomed to.

In Chapter 20, Tom Clifford meets Frank and takes him to the Logan's Boarding House, run by Mr. Logan, his young wife Nora and their infant. The twelve borders in the house all make good money working on the docks and Tom gets Frank a job there as well. Emer is not pleased, as she wants Frank to work in an office. Frank takes the job anyway, and spends his time working and drinking beer with his coworkers. Despite the good money, Frank's thoughts are always dark, as he is envious of the people he sees on the train who have a better life.



Chapters 21-25

Chapters 21-25 Summary and Analysis

Frank spends his days working on the docks and drinking at night with his coworkers. After a bit of time Frank discovers that Emer is engaged to another man. Emer will not see Frank or speak to him and Frank knows that if he wants her back he has to find a better job. Frank lands a job at Blue Cross and leaves for his training every day, dressed in a suit and tie, much to the amusement of the boarders that remain at the boarding house.

In Chapter 22, Frank trains at Blue Cross, but realizes that he is doing so for Emer and not himself. Leaving for lunch one day and not returning, Frank sails on the Staten Island Ferry several times, taking in the sight of the Statue of Liberty, remembering all those who had sailed into port with dreams of the future, including his parents, 25 years before.

Frank gets his job back at Port Warehouses, making more money and he doesn't mind the work. He has his friends, including a black man named Horace from Jamaica. Frank likes Horace and cannot understand why Horace is not allowed to go into certain places because of his color. Horace does not seem bothered by it, telling Frank that he is still young and might understand when he is older.

In Chapter 23, Frank is sent home early when work is slow and winds up at New York University. Frank remembers his dream of becoming a student and meets with the Dean of Admissions and is able to talk his way into the school on a probationary basis. Frank is in heaven, buying his textbooks so that he can ride on the subway and be seen as a student rather than a dockworker.

School is harder than Frank imagined as he is alternately praised and ridiculed by self-important professors. Frank takes the ridicule silently, bearing the anger, and swearing that he will excel despite the treatment of some around him.

In Chapter 24, the same professor that ridiculed Frank previously now praises him, asking him to express his opinions to the class. Frank does so unwillingly, still afraid of being the object of teasing and laughter. After class Frank takes the stairs to avoid running into anyone, but winds up setting off the fire alarm and being taken in for a report. He has no way to explain that his embarrassment at being the center of attention in class is what leads him to the door.

In Chapter 25, Tom decides to leave New York for Detroit and asks Frank if he'd like to go. Frank is tempted to get away from the torment of working the docks. The men at work think Frank is too big for his britches as he is attending the university and tease and torment him. Horace is the only one who does not. Horace tells Frank to ignore the men and to keep working hard in school. Frank does, not only to please himself, but to

make Horace proud of him as well. The men on the dock don't know what to make of Frank so they are cruel, but he remains calm, thanks to Horace.

In school, Frank feels out of place as well, listening to the students in the cafeteria talk about nonsense such as existentialism. Frank does not know what they are talking about and decides the only way to learn is to look it up. After achieving his dream of becoming a student, Frank is left belonging nowhere. He is below the level of recognition of the students and the men who he works with think that he is acting too good for them.



Chapters 26-30

Chapters 26-30 Summary and Analysis

Frank rents a room from Mrs. Klein who lives alone with her son Michael. The Germans had taken prisoner Michael and his father when they visited Europe during the war. Mrs. Agnes Klein is a lonely woman who hovers around waiting for Frank to return home so she has company. Every two weeks two nuns arrive to help Agnes take care of Michael. Frank wishes he could live in the rooming house around the corner that belongs to Mary O'Brien, where everyone is always happy.

In Chapter 27, Frank is called to the office of his faculty advisor and warned about his grades. In order to study more Frank works only part time on the docks and takes a series of temporary jobs in offices to make ends meet. Frank works for a hat maker and in a shipping office among other things. The office life is stifling to him and unable to bear it he leaves.

With his brother Malachy in the Air Force, Frank sends for his younger brother Michael. The boy arrives, stick thin and Frank cares for him as the young man works several jobs. The risk of being drafted is still in the air, so Michael decides to join the Air Force, preferring the blue uniform. Once Malachy is out of the Air Force, Michael can continue to send his allotment to their mother in Ireland.

In Chapter 28, Frank meets Alberta 'Mike' Smalls, the most beautiful girl he's ever seen. Mike introduces herself after class and the two go for a beer at Rocky's. Frank is beside himself, wondering what to do or say to this lovely creature. Mike tells him that she is almost engaged to a football player named Bob and Frank can barely contain his raging jealousy. Mike grew up in Rhode Island, raised by her grandmother after her parents divorced. They are from two different worlds, but this does not stop Frank from longing for her.

Mrs. Klein is in failing health and unable to care for Michael any longer. The nuns tell Frank that they will be moved to Catholic homes where they can be cared for. Frank moves into Mary O'Brien's and enjoys himself with the other Irish boarders who sing and dance happily most days, dock workers who don't look down on him because he goes to school.

In Chapter 29, Frank is in school and he is afraid to raise his hand and express his opinions for fear of being made fun of or misunderstood. After receiving a C in one class, Frank longs to tell the professor of his love for the subject, how he reads his textbook at the docks and is mocked by coworkers, but is afraid to be pitied.

Frank meets Andy Peters, who gets him a job at a bank processing loan applications. Andy tells Frank that he reads the applications and sometimes changes the status so



that people he feels sorry for can get money from the bank. Andy studies Philosophy, after a dishonorable discharge, accused of having sex with a sheep.

In Chapter 30, Frank has to write a story about adversity and tells the tale about the plot of land his father had applied for. Frank and worked the field with his father and brothers, planting vegetables. The day came to dig up the land and Frank and Malachy had gone with his mother to do so as his father had gone to Coventry to work and never sent a dime back. Angela had been forced to borrow and accept charity to support her family. At the plot the McCourt's found the land had been dug up and the vegetable harvested.

Frank vows to write only the good things that have happened to his family from that point on.



Chapters 31-35

Chapters 31-35 Summary and Analysis

Frank attends a dance where he meets a girl named Delores. The two hit it off and Delores tells Frank that he can see her home. Frank hopes for some 'excitement' as he calls sex, but discovers that Delores has a man, Nick in the Navy, who her father does not like. Frank still hopes for sex, but discovers that Delores lives at home. After taking the train home, Frank is discouraged, unable to understand the women in America, who seem to want one thing while they have another.

In Chapter 32, Frank has difficulty keeping up with work and his studies while he is focused on Mike Smalls. Their lives have been very different and Frank is embarrassed to share his past with her because of the way he grew up. Bob is away and Mike invites Frank to meet her family. Frank meets Mike's father, stepmother and grandmother, but does not feel comfortable.

Frank gets summer work on the docks and stops to see Horace. The two share a sandwich, with Frank wishing that he could have had a father like Horace, and sad because of the race issues that are still evident everywhere.

In Chapter 33, Frank and Mike have their first fight because he will not wear a tie to a cocktail party. Mike leaves him where he stands and heads to the party without him. Frank spends some time drinking with a friend, and then wanders the streets of New York, wondering who is with Mike now. Depression settles in as Frank realizes that he cannot live in two countries at once, with his mind in Ireland and his heart with Mike Smalls in New York.

In Chapter 34, Mike calls Frank after a fight with her father and moves into Mary O'Brien's home where she and Frank have sex. Afterward her father sends money and Mike is able to rent a small apartment and Frank gets his own. When Mike goes home for a visit she calls and tells Frank that Zoe isn't mad anymore and he can come visit. As Frank has been fired from the bank for talking to a union organizer at lunch one day, he has time.

In Chapter 35, it is 1957 and Frank graduates from NYU and tries to find a job teaching, only to be told he looks too young or sounds too Irish. Discouraged, Frank continues to work on the docks until he finds a job as a replacement for a retiring teacher at McKee Vocational and Technical High School on Staten Island. Though Frank has been warned to stay away from the vocational schools he decides to take the position despite knowing nothing on the subjects of economics or citizenship. The principal, Mr. Sorola, tells Frank to stay a few pages ahead of the kids and he'll do fine.



Chapters 36-40

Chapters 36-40 Summary and Analysis

Frank celebrates his new job with some beer at the local tavern much to Mike's consternation. Arriving at work the following day hung over, Frank does his best to reign in the students that have run the classroom until today. In the cafeteria Frank meets Jake Homer, another teacher who gives him advice on handling the kids. In the teacher's lounge Frank meets some more colleagues who either love to teach or have given up and go through the motions. Head spinning, Frank makes it through his first day, with no idea what he is doing, or how to accomplish anything.

In Chapter 37, Frank struggles through his job, learning the delaying tactics of the students. On the ferry ride home at night Frank wonders if this is how he will spend his life, and if working his way through college to teach was the best way to spend his time.

Despite the way the kids fight learning, Frank does manage to connect with them on some level, discussing Ireland and how he grew up. Honest to a fault, Frank tells his students that he did not graduate from High School and earns their respect and envy.

The students try and convince Frank that they have no books. Frank at first believes them, but is able to earn their respect yet again when the principal intervenes and Frank lies for his students to save them embarrassment. The following day all the students have their books and a bit more faith in their teacher.

In Chapter 38, Frank's brother runs a bar called Malachy's with his brother Michael. The two are doing well, with Malachy acting and becoming famous. Angela and Alphie are happy in Limerick and would like to come visit.

Frank is still poor, trying to live on a teacher's salary and still send his mother money. Unable to pay his electric bill Frank has to ask his neighbor, Bradford Rush if he can plug his blanket in with an extension cord out the window. Rush agrees reluctantly and the arrangement works for a few weeks until he pulls the plug. Frank hands a spoon out the window and taps on Bradford's glass until the man relents and plugs the wire back in.

Bradford moves out a week later, calling Frank a prick on the way out.

In Chapter 39, Frank's mood is dark as he struggles to make ends meet. Life would be better if he wasn't a teacher, if he could be carefree like his brothers. The students are not interested in learning and Frank struggles to engage them. Frank finds essays in the classroom closet written by students over the years. His current students are riveted by the essays and bits of history that involve their own families. The remainder of the school year Frank's students copy the essays, learning their own history, and beginning to understand that learning is not a bad thing.



In Chapter 40, Frank works on the docks for the summer and shares his flat with a friend of Malachy's, Bill Galetly. Bill is trying to find himself, and spends his days naked, eating bananas and staring in a mirror. Reading Plato and the Gospel of John, Bill rambles at Frank, discussing the nothingness of life.



Chapters 41-45

Chapters 41-45 Summary and Analysis

Mike, now Alberta, wants to get married but Frank wants to live an exciting life. Alberta breaks up with him, telling him that at 28 he should be settled down, but Frank does not want to live a mirror image of Zoe's life. Alberta tells Frank there is someone else and he spends the night wandering New York, wondering how he has lived this long in a state of ignorance. At his brother's bar Frank speaks to a few people but they remind him of the patrons of the Biltmore that looked down on him so many years ago. Frank wonders what his students would think of him, considering himself a fraud.

In Chapter 42, Alberta takes Frank back, convincing him to move forward with his life. Though he had longed for her while she was away, the thought of marriage again fills Frank with dread. Getting a loan from the bank, Frank is able to pay his bills and visit Limerick. Arriving, Frank sees that things have changed, his friends are gone. Frank is asked if Limerick is changed and he states that he sees less people hungry and needy. Frank realizes that there is little difference between New York and Limerick these days.

In Chapter 43, Angela and Alphie visit from Limerick. Frank is embarrassed by his mother and he and Malachy have little patience for the woman who raised them. Angela is demanding and refuses to try and fit in to the way they live their lives now. Nothing seems to please Mrs. McCourt and her bitter ways make it difficult for Frank to deal with her. Angela's bitterness about America and how different it is from Limerick make it difficult for anyone to have a good time.

In Chapter 44, Frank continues to teach, taking the ferry each day to McKee, then taking classes for his Master's Degree in English. While traveling for work and school he sometimes stops to see his mother who has taken an apartment in New York. Angela cooks for Frank if she knows he is coming and they share some tea. Angela sometimes reflects on her time in New York when she was younger, but does not often speak of the past and the sadness of Frank's father's drinking every night.

In Chapter 45, it is 1961 and Frank and Alberta get married at City Hall. The McCourt's and their friends stop for drinks before the reception and Frank drinks more than Angela is happy with. Despite her request that he slow down Frank does not, telling his wife that he is tired of being respectful. On the way to the reception Frank and his friend drop the cake in the street, then fall asleep while the wives complain about the Irish. The drinking continues and as the night grows late Frank and Alberta head for home but the night does not end as planned. Upset with her husband's drinking, Alberta leaves Frank on the doorstep with his friend Jim Collins and drives off in a cab with Jim's wife Sheila.



Chapters 46-50

Chapters 46-50 Summary and Analysis

Frank's father comes to New York, hoping to become part of his family. Angela is unsure what to do, as he says he has quit drinking and is a new man. Frank tells her to see what happens. Malachy Sr. arrives on the Queen Mary, drunk and his son Malachy takes him to a meeting of Alcoholic's Anonymous. Frank's father is not a changed man, and Frank sees that if he is not careful he will turn out like him. On his father's last night he and Frank go for a walk and the two stop at many bars for some beer. Angela tells Frank the next day that his father had gone mad drinking whiskey when he returned to her apartment and she called the police and had him taken to the ship and he is on his way back to Ireland.

In Chapter 47, Frank continues to try and engage his students. When they complain about the required reading he manages to get the class *Catcher in the Rye* but the book is taken from the class because it is not on the syllabus. Instead Frank teaches Shakespeare, but does it by having the children act out the plays. Once they recognize the famous quotes they have heard over the years they become more interested. Frank wishes that he could be a more powerful teacher and dominate his students, but they are learning, even if it is not in a standard way.

In Chapter 48, Frank's mother has moved closer to all of her children but never visits unless forced. Frank remembers one time his mother told him how she invited a homeless woman to her apartment, fed her and cleaned her clothes. The woman had spent the night in warmth and been gone in the morning. Frank wonders how lonely his mother must be, to have to invite a homeless woman in, and why her own family are almost strangers to her.

In Chapter 49, Frank takes a job at New York Technical College in Brooklyn. While there he also teaches a class of paraprofessionals, women who are teacher aides in elementary schools, hoping to someday get their own teaching degrees. The women remind Frank of his own mother and her struggles. When the semester ends he calls his mother and takes her out for a snack. Once again Angela is unable to break free of the bitterness she carries, but Frank for once is able to put it aside and enjoy her company.

In Chapter 50, it is 1971 and Frank's daughter Maggie is born. He and Alberta also buy the home they have been tenants in. They are able to do so because a man that Frank had befriended, Virgil, had died and left them money. Frank had enjoyed spending afternoons with Virgil and listening to the man talk of the past, and Virgil had enjoyed Frank's company as well. Frank had considered asking Virgil to be Maggie's godfather, but instead had gotten a call that the man had passed away and the Frank was in his will.



Chapters 51-56

Chapters 51-56 Summary and Analysis

In 1972 Frank takes a permanent teaching job at Stuyvesant, one of the best schools in the area. At first Frank is tough, finally having his own class and running things as he believes they should be. The students rebel and Frank realizes that he cannot pretend to be something he is not. Frank is not the teacher that simply grinds his students and forces them to learn by rote. Frank enjoys learning, and wants the students to enjoy it as well.

Frank takes his wife and daughter to Ireland when Maggie is six-weeks-old so that she will always have visions of Ireland in her youth. Once there the conflicts in the North are clearer to Frank when he visits his father. The Catholics and the Protestants will never get along as far as his family is concerned. Frank is warned to be careful, as an American Catholic is easy to spot. Frank sees that things in Ireland are similar to the conflicts that are taking place in America over the Vietnam War. Angela visits with Frank in Ireland as well, and he can see the way his mother comes alive while they are in Dublin.

In Chapter 52, Frank becomes a Creative Writing teacher and struggles with how to engage his students. After watching TV cartoons with Maggie one Saturday morning Frank tells his students that cartoon characters are based on the famous heroes in writing he is once more able to bring his students joy in learning.

In Chapter 53, Frank struggles to keep his marriage and family together, but the differences in his life and Alberta's keep getting bigger. Maggie is the only thing keeping them together. Frank cherishes his time with his daughter but as the marriage crumbles he is unwilling to leave Maggie in the middle. When Maggie is eight, Frank leaves his home for good.

In Chapter 54, Frank's Creative Writing class writes their own children's books. A group of young children are given the books to read and they visit the high school to let their opinions be known. The high schoolers are crushed to learn that the stories they had thought were so clever were not pleasing at all to the young children. Frank, suffering from his own disappointments in life finds it hard to bear his own students disappointment.

In Chapter 55, Angela McCourt dies, leaving Frank to wonder about her life and his. The struggles of Angela's life are visible on her face as she is laid out for her wake. The Irish brothers mourn their mother, remembering her providing for them, and the good times they had even living in poverty. Frank sees his mother for who she is, a woman that lead a hard life, doing what needed to be done in order to provide for her family.



In Chapter 56, it is 1985 and Frank's father dies. Unsure of what to do, Frank flies to Ireland, knowing that his mother would have told him he should go. Frank laughs at the funeral and his cousins think that he is crying. Frank is unable to feel sadness for the shell of a man laid out before him, but later remembers the man his father was before he started drinking. That is the man that Frank mourns, but he was mourned many years ago when he left his family when Frank was ten.

The same year, Frank and his brothers bring his mother home to Ireland. The occasion is sad, but the boys and their families remember their mother for what she was, not the sad woman she had become.



Characters

Frank McCourt

The author, Francis McCourt who relates the tale of his emigration from Ireland to New York in 1949 and the years that followed. McCourt had been born in New York, but moved back to Ireland with his parents as a young child. Growing up Frank dreams of returning to America and making his way in the world. Once he arrives in New York, Frank struggles with fitting into life in America, trying to find his place and earn enough money to support his mother and younger brothers in Ireland. Frank works in a hotel, and on the docks, constantly worrying about what others think of him and feeling like he is not quite good enough.

Frank escapes to the Korean War, unable to tell those around him that he is thankful for the chance to be something other than a glorified janitor. The war is no different for Frank who still tries to find his place in life. Returning to New York, Frank talks his way into college at New York University and earns a teaching degree. Finally able to get a job despite his young looks and brogue, Frank finds it difficult to engage the young men and women in his classes. Stepping outside the accepted routine of those around him, Frank is finally able to earn the respect of his students and at least in the classroom, begins to feel that he might be worthy.

Frank meets and marries Alberta Smalls, a Protestant from Rhode Island. Feeling that he is the luckiest man on earth to have such a beautiful woman love him, Frank tries his best to be everything that Alberta expects him to be. This is difficult because while Alberta wishes to live her life in the routines established by her grandmother, Frank longs for the freedoms of New York, liking nothing more than spending his time in the Village, drinking with his friends and listening to music.

The birth of his daughter Maggie brings some sense of maturity for Frank, though he still struggles with his wish for the freedom of youth. His unwillingness to conform to the life that his wife wants leads to their marriage ending.

Frank McCourt, the oldest of his parents surviving children, is a kind man, but one that does not know how to live life without conflict. His youth, followed by his years in New York are spent trying to please everyone but himself. Frank always feels as if he is not quite good enough, and that if anything good happens to him, it will surely be taken away, as he is undeserving.

Angela McCourt

Frank's mother, Angela has lived a difficult life, raising her children on her own after her husband abandons his family. A proud woman, Angela struggles to accept charity, but does so that her sons can survive. Once Frank is grown he emigrates from Ireland to



New York and sends Angela whatever he can so that she can have an easier life. His brothers do the same as they get older, and Angela can at last live a comfortable life.

Despite the fact that Angela no longer has to struggle in poverty to support her family, it is apparent to the reader that it is very difficult for the woman to find joy in life. The difficulties that Angela faced for so long are a constant for her, and any happiness is met with a bitterness that good things will not last. Even after moving to New York with her youngest son, Angela finds it difficult to embrace the fact that she no longer has to fight for survival. Her constant sour mood is something that her sons find hard to deal with, as they have all worked hard to make sure that life is no longer a battle for their mother.

Angela dies as she lived, Frank comparing her coloring and casket to the color of the poverty she lived in while in Ireland. It seems that Angela has never been able to accept that life can change, and that good things can happen, despite hardships that have been faced. Angela is unable to enjoy having her family around her in America because she has been beaten down by life and does not ever recover from the harshness of her realities.

Alberta 'Mike' Smalls

Alberta "Mike" Smalls is a beautiful Protestant from Rhode Island, raised by her grandmother Zoe after her parents divorce. Frank McCourt falls in love with Mike while they are in college and cannot believe his luck that such a creature loves him in return. Introduced as Mike to the reader, Alberta wants her life to mimic the life that she lived growing up, comfortable and routine, something that eventually comes between her and Frank. While Mike longs for the comforts of marriage and a settle life, Frank enjoys being single and having a good time in the bars of the Village in New York.

As the novel progresses and Mike matures, she begins to call herself by her given name, Alberta. This is the name she uses when she convinces Frank that they should get married after a brief separation. Alberta is a teacher as well, one who enjoys the routines of the classroom and of life, which brings conflict to her marriage. Frank continues to yearn for freedom and good times while Alberta wishes that her husband would grow up and become the man she wants him to be.

Despite the fact that Alberta loves Frank, she loves the routine of life more, and is unwilling to change for her husband. The changes that Frank has made trying to become the man his wife wants him to be are expected and no concessions are made in return. As a result, after years of being together, struggling to be a family, Alberta and Frank separate, unable to give each other anything more.

The Priest

An unnamed priest from Los Angeles who takes Frank under his wing when he first arrives in New York. The priest encourages Frank to speak to some Protestants on the ship in the hopes of getting a job in Kentucky on their farm and is disappointed when the



young man does not. The priest takes Frank with him to the city by train and arranges his lodging as well as his first job in the Biltmore Hotel. That night the priest gets drunk while the two are out to dinner and he tries to accost Frank in the hotel room.

The priest travels to Virginia and repents, then meets Frank again before he returns to Los Angeles. The priest is contrite, promising Frank that it was the alcohol that made him behave that way, and promising to never touch another drop.

Though the priest is not in the novel for a long period of time, Frank's experience with the man makes him question what he has always believed to be true as a good Catholic.

Owen

A sailor on the MS Irish Oak, Owen encourages Frank to read and get an education. Despite being a well read man, Owen is a simple sailor because of mistakes from his past, presumably from the effects of alcohol.

Tim Costello

The owner of Costello's bar, Tim is an Irishman who gets annoyed by his countrymen spending too much time drinking and living a stereotypical life. Costello sends Frank to the New York Library and orders him to read and learn.

Tom Clifford

Frank's first friend in New York, a border at Mrs. Austin's house, Tom takes Frank out for a few drinks at the Rhinelander to meet some Irish girls.

Corporal Dunphy

The corporal that taught Frank to clean his rifle in basic training resulting in Frank being assigned as the colonel's orderly. Dunphy appears to be impressed by Frank because he likes to read.

Di Angelo

A member of Frank's basic training unit, Di Angelo impresses Frank with his belief that God is not a being to be feared, but more of a friend. Di Angelo gives Frank the impression that the Church belongs to everyone, not just the wealthy.



Rappaport

A Jewish soldier with Frank in Bavaria, Rappaport reacts strongly to their arrival at Dachau for laundry duty. Frank realizes while in Dachau that others have suffered as well as the Irish, and that he has a great respect for Jews.

Emer

An Irish girl that Frank meets in New York at a dance, Emer waits for Frank in New York, declaring her love for him while he serves in the Korean War.

Horace

A black man that works on the docks with Frank, Horace reminds Frank about the importance of education. The black man's calm manner in the eye of the racism that is rampant in New York teaches Frank patience and he wishes that this gentle man was the father he hasn't had since Malachy Sr. abandoned his family so long ago.

Malachy McCourt Sr.

The father of Frank, Malachy abandoned his family when Frank was ten-years-old. After moving to England for work, Malachy never sent money or returned, forcing his wife to accept charity and his sons to leave school to help support the family.

Malachy Sr. returns to the lives of his sons when they are older, claiming to be a changed man who wants his family to be together. This proves to be untrue when he arrives on the Queen Mary in New York and has to be carried off the ship because he is so drunk. Frank's father returns to Ireland, where he dies an old man. Frank is unable to mourn the man that he never knew, but mourns the man his father was before alcohol became the center of his life.

Malachy McCourt Jr.

One of Frank's younger brothers, Malachy is a healthy, handsome man who's personality makes his life in New York much easier than Frank's. An actor and singer, Malachy is popular with the crowds of people that used to shun Frank when he cleaned the lobby of the Biltmore Hotel. Despite their different personalities, the brothers are close, and Malachy is always there for Frank when he needs him.

Alphie McCourt

The youngest of the McCourt brothers, Alphie moves to New York with his mother when Angela emigrates to America. Though the strange ways of the new world perplex him at



first, Alphonse adjusts quickly and moves out on his own before long. Despite this Alphonse does what he can for his mother, just as the other brothers do.

Jim Collins

Jim Collins is a friend of Frank and Alberta's. The night that Frank and Alberta get married, Frank winds up spending his wedding night with Jim as Alberta is angry at Frank for getting drunk.

Virgil Frank

An old man and former neighbor of the McCourt's, Virgil leaves Frank and Alberta money when he dies, which enables them to buy their home.

Zoe

Alberta's grandmother.

Corporal Sneed

The corporal in the army who takes Frank's three-day pass for not picking up a cigarette butt when ordered.

Eddie Gilligan

The shop steward at the Biltmore Hotel.

Shemanski

The clerk that Frank replaces when the soldier has a two-week furlough.

Uncle Pat

Frank's mother's brother, who lived with her in Ireland.

Uncle Pa Keating

Frank's uncle, a no-nonsense man that Frank admires.



Objects/Places

MS Irish Oak

The freighter that Frank McCourt takes from Ireland to New York in October of 1949.

The Biltmore Hotel

The hotel in New York where Frank gets his first job, cleaning the lobby.

Dempsey's

The restaurant owned by Jack Dempsey where the priest takes Frank to dinner. Afterward, the priest attempts to sexually assault Frank.

The New Yorker Hotel

The hotel where Frank and the Catholic priest stay when they arrive in New York.

Costello's

The bar where Frank meets Tim Costello, who tells Frank to spend his time in the library rather than bars, giving Frank directions to the main library where he will spend many happy hours over the years.

The Rhinelander

A bar and dance hall where Frank goes for a few beers with Tom Clifford.

Saint Vincent's

The church where Frank hopes to attend mass on his first Christmas in New York, only to wind up feeling uncomfortable and leaving.

McAnn's

The restaurant where the priest from Los Angeles takes Frank to apologize for his behavior when Frank first arrived in New York.



Queen Mary

The ship that Frank's father arrives on when visiting his family in New York.

McKee Vocational and Technical School

The first school where Frank is able to get a teaching job.

Malachy's

The bar operated by Frank's brother, Malachy, in Greenwich Village.

The Village

Greenwich Village in New York, where Frank enjoys spending his time.

Limerick

The area in Ireland where Frank McCourt grew up.

Unity Hospital

The hospital in Brooklyn where Frank's daughter Maggie is born.

Fort Dix

The Army base where Frank has basic training during the Korean War.

Dachau

The concentration camp where Frank takes the laundry for his company while stationed overseas during the Korean War.



Themes

Depression

Frank McCourt struggles with depression throughout his novel, 'Tis A Memoir. Though Frank refers to it as 'dark clouds' in his head, it is clear that it is depression that McCourt suffers from. Frank has trouble dealing with the disappointments of life, either real or imagined. Accepting himself as worthy is another problem that faces Frank daily. McCourt feels that he is not equal to those around him, whether working in a hotel lobby or as a teacher in a vocational high school.

Frank's feelings of inadequacy stem from the fact that his father abandoned his family when Frank was a young boy of ten. His mother Angela's struggle to provide for her family forever altered the young Frank as he is left to wonder what made his father chose alcohol over his wife and sons. Frank's abandonment issues follow him into adulthood as he is left to wonder what others will find him lacking. The resulting depression makes it impossible for Frank to simply enjoy his life and the success he is able to make of himself.

Frank's depression mirrors his mother's, though it is difficult for Frank to accept Angela's bitterness at the comfortable life that she finally lives. With her son's supporting her, Angela finally lives comfortably, wanting for little, yet Mrs. McCourt has trouble accepting anything without finding something to complain about. Though Frank has little patience for his mother's complaining, the similarities between Angela's bitterness and Frank's self-doubt and depression are clear to the reader. Neither Frank or his mother can be completely happy as they feel that whatever good they have will be snatched away, or they will be discovered as frauds, unworthy of all that they have.

Alcoholism

Alcoholism plays a large role in the novel, 'Tis A Memoir. Frank McCourt is the oldest surviving child of his parents Angela and Malachy McCourt. Frank is forced to leave school before high school in order to help his mother support the family after his father abandons them. The elder McCourt is unable to control his thirst for alcohol, spending his pay at every bar he comes across before finally leaving his family for England. Though Malachy intends to work and send money home to his family in Ireland, he is unable to give up drinking, instead giving up his wife and sons.

After Frank moves to New York and begins a life of his own, he struggles with alcohol at times as well, though never to the extent of his father. Frank tends to turn to alcohol only when he cannot deal with overwhelming events in his life, yet he always manages to pull himself back before he crosses the line his father did.

Frank's drinking causes problems within his own marriage when his wife Alberta complains about his nights at the bar and his tendency to drown his problems with



friends. Frank does not see his drinking as a problem, just stress relief. He eventually comes to realize that he can easily go down the same path as his father and is able to curtail his habit so that he does not lose all that is dear to him.

Family

Family is central in the novel. The novel details the life of Frank McCourt as he leaves Ireland and moves to New York at the age of 19. Frank longs to better himself, to become something in America, but most of all he hopes to support his family in a way that his father did not. Throughout the novel the reader is reminded that though life is difficult and can be a constant struggle, family comes first.

At the beginning of the novel Frank McCourt works hard, lives cheaply, and sends half his pay home to Ireland to support his mother and brothers. As Frank grows older and his brother's mature, they all work together to make sure that their mother, who sacrificed so much for them is provided for. There is never a question of shirking this duty, it is simply expected and accepted.

Frank's own family, his wife Alberta and his daughter Maggie are also important to him, though his relationship with Alberta is a difficult one. Though Frank loves his wife, he grew up watching his own parents' failings and has nothing to base a healthy relationship on. Frank leans toward his father's trouble with alcohol, drinking to find happiness, though he never gives in to the addiction completely. This leads to trouble in his marriage, one that eventually ends. The relationship between Frank and his daughter is important to him, and he tries to build a deep trust and love on the remembered mornings of his youth before his father abandon his family for alcohol.

Through the novel, Frank's family is important, his every decision made with their best interest at heart. Frank wants to provide for his family in a way that his father did not, as well as make them proud of him. Despite his accomplishments in America, Frank always feels as if he is not quite all that he could be, that somehow he could have done better for those he loves.



Style

Perspective

'Tis, A Memoir, is written from the perspective of Frank McCourt, and details his life in New York when he emigrates from Ireland at the age of 19. Though Frank has grown up in Ireland, he was born in New York when his parents lived there in his youth. When life in New York failed the older McCourt's, they moved their young family back to Limerick.

Frank's youth was colored by poverty and disappointment when his father abandons his family, leaving his wife Angela to seek charity in order to survive. Frank leaves school in order to help support his family, returning to New York and the lure of success so that his brothers do not have to work as he did. Though Frank eventually earns his degree and becomes a teacher as he dreamed when he was younger, his father's abandonment haunts him, causing Frank to question his worth and abilities all of his life.

Frank spends his life comparing himself to those around him, trying to become worthy in his own eyes. Frank feels himself lacking in some way, always expecting to be exposed as a fraud, unworthy of the things that he is able to achieve through his constant struggles.

Tone

The tone of 'Tis, A Memoir, tends to be objective, though there are times of conflict. Frank McCourt relates the story of his life in New York in a calm, matter of fact way, simply describing the facts and events as they occur and letting the reader judge for oneself. Though there are parts of the novel that are dark and can provoke sadness, the author's way of stating things as fact tend to allow the reader to accept events as the author did. The reader is able to feel as if they are part of the events that take place because of the way the writer expresses himself.

The reader is also able to get a clear sense of what the author feels about events that take place in his life.

The author's tone depends to become more combative when dealing with issues involving his self worth. Though there are very few instances in the novel where Frank is directly ridiculed because of whom he is or where he comes from, McCourt believes he is constantly being judged and found lacking. It is at times like this that McCourt becomes defensive, feeling that he has to prove himself, though in reality he is the only one judging himself.

Structure

The novel is written in a free flowing manner, broken down into a prologue and fifty six chapters. The chapters vary in length from two pages to more than ten, and describe different events in the life of Frank McCourt. The narrative is rambling and free flowing, with no differentiation between quotations and descriptive passages. McCourt simply relates the tale of his life and the people in it, as if telling his story over a drink in a pub rather than in print. This is a bit difficult to adjust to at first, but once the reader is used to McCourt's style of writing the tale is easy to follow, providing the reader with a window into the past.



Quotes

"And I'd start crying to myself on that deck chair with the gorgeous Atlantic all around me, New York ahead, city of my dreams where I'd have the golden tan, the dazzling white teeth. I'd wonder what in God's name was wrong with me that I should be missing Limerick already, city of gray miseries, the place where I dreamed of escape to New York. I'd hear my mother's warning, The devil you know is better than the devil you don't know."

Chapter One, pg. 15

"She laughs and my face is on fire again. Tom takes a long drink of beer and I know that I'm useless with these girls so I leave and walk down Third Avenue taking the odd look at my reflection in shop windows and giving up hope."

Chapter Three, pg. 29

"There are days when the girls take off their coats and the way they look in sweaters and blouses is such an occasion of sin I have to lock myself in a toilet cubicle and interfere with myself and I have to be quiet for fear of being discovered by someone, a Puerto Rican busboy or a Greek waiter, who will run to the maitre d' and report that the lobby houseman is wankin' away in the bathroom."

Chapter Four, pg. 31

"There are days the rain is so heavy I have to spend a dime on the subway and I see people my own age with books and bags that say Columbia, Fordham, NYU, City College, and I know I want to be one of them, a student."

Chapter 10, pg. 59

"I can't tell Eddie or Tom or anyone else how I'd like to get down on my two knees and thank Mao Tse-tung for sending his troops to Korea and liberating me from the Biltmore Hotel."

Chapter 11, pg. 64

"Di Angelo tells me I'm full of shit. He says I should go to Mass if I want to, that the priests don't own the Church. I can't think like DiAngelo, not yet. I'm afraid of the priests and the nuns and the bishops and the cardinals and the Pope. I'm afraid of God."

Chapter 13, pgs. 76-77

"Still I can't say the usual three Hail Marys since Jesus is mentioned and He wasn't any way helpful to the Jews in recent times. I don't know if it's proper to say the Our Father touching the door of an oven but it seems harmless enough and it's what I say hoping the Jewish dead will understand my ignorance."

Chapter 15, pg. 87

"I could be wearing the uniform of a general but all I am to them is Frankie McCourt the scabby-eyed telegram boy with the poor suffering mother."

Chapter 18, pg. 104



"I am in heaven and the first thing to do is buy the required textbooks, cover them with the purple and white NYU book jackets so that people in the subway will look at me admiringly."

Chapter 23, pg. 135

"When Mike Small says, What are you thinking about? I don't know what to say for fear she might think I'm peculiar the way I wonder about the ones who were sent back. If my mother or father had been sent back I wouldn't be on this deck with the lights of Manhattan a sparkling dream before me."

Chapter 32, pg. 181

"If my mother were here she'd be puzzled. She'd wonder why these women complain. Lord above, she'd say, they have everything. They're warm and clean and well fed and they complain about everything. My mother and the women in the slums of Limerick had nothing and rarely complained. They said it was the will of God."

Chapter 34, pg. 196

"We kiss her and I place on her breast a shilling I had borrowed from her long ago and when we walk the long corridor to the elevator I look back at her in the coffin, my gray mother in a cheap gray coffin, the color of the beggary."

Chapter 55, pg. 332



Topics for Discussion

What is Frank McCourt's goal when he moves to New York?

How does Frank feel about his role in the Army during the Korean War?

What is Frank's relationship with his mother? His father?

What causes Frank to question his worth as a person? As a husband and provider?
How does he overcome his feelings?

Frank is able to work his way through college and get his teaching degree. How does Frank relate to his students as he was never a high school student himself?

If Frank an effective teacher? Why?

Why does Frank and Alberta's marriage fail? Is one party more at fault than the other?