

Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Angela's Ashes

by Frank McCourt

written by Rita Truschel

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Angela's Ashes

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. identify the writing conventions of memoir as a genre.
2. identify conflict in the narrative arc of character, setting, plot, and theme.
3. identify irony.
4. identify and analyze the use of literary elements such as absurdity, allusion, dialect, euphemism, idiom, euphony, impression, understatement, sarcasm, satire, paradox, mood, pathos, persona, tone, and voice.
5. analyze the effect of word choice and sentence structure to express meaning, tone, and theme.
6. analyze the depiction and treatment of women in a patriarchal, misogynist society as a theme.
7. analyze the development of religion as a theme.
8. analyze the relationship between Frank McCourt's purpose and audience and his narrative's elements and structure.
9. offer a close reading of *Angela's Ashes* and support interpretations and assertions using evidence from the text and knowledge of his biography, literary allusions, and period history.
11. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam.
12. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam.

Introductory Lecture

I. AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND MEMOIR

Autobiography is the story of a person's life, written by that person. Since ancient times, autobiography has been the purview of people with important and lasting accomplishments, for the purposes of explanation, self-justification, public instruction, moral example, and entertainment. With the rise of the popular press in the seventeenth century, autobiography expanded to include popular celebrities and lesser persons with significant or scandalous experiences.

Memoir is a form of autobiography, typically focused on meaningful incidents within a related time span. Memoir relies on the author's memories, feelings, and interpretation of events' significance. The memoir author is selective, not all-inclusive. The degree of intimacy can vary. Historically, a famous public figure could focus on major events and participants, abilities, goals, and outcomes without disclosing much about personal or interior life. Since the 1980s, memoirs have become popular on the strength of the authors' emotional "honesty" and analysis of singular experiences, told in a dramatic narrative fashion.

Confession is a related genre in which private, secret, or shocking details of an author's life are revealed. The term "confession" has connotations from theology, as in professing beliefs and redemption, as well as the law and admission of guilt. The early Christian bishop St. Augustine (354-430) wrote his *Confessions* to reflect on his childhood, lusty youth, and intellectual and spiritual growth leading to his religious conversion. Augustine's *Confessions* remains influential in Western civilization.

There are fictional confessions as well, for example, Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722).

Autobiography has value as a record of an author's direct and intimate knowledge and perceptions. Autobiographical writers may incorporate feedback from family and friends, journalistic investigation, and research to add information, verify impressions, and widen perspective. Effective memoirs, on the other hand, delve into larger themes of history, culture, gender, or spirituality.

Whether writing autobiography or memoir, authors writing about themselves may be unreliable narrators who withhold or misjudge information out of ignorance, faulty memory, bias, or self-protection. A careful reader must pay attention to the author's persona, the impression that the writer projects.

Contemporary memoir has been caricatured as self-absorption, complaint, and manipulative deceit. Memoir writers have been criticized for using composite and invented characters, altered chronology, imagined dialogue and scenes, factual omissions, and subjective emphasis. Vivian Gornick, author of *Fierce Attachments* and other personal narratives, has justified these methods as art shaping material that would not otherwise interest readers. Nonetheless, James Frey's 2003 memoir about his drug addiction and rehabilitation, *A Million Little Pieces*, caused a publishing scandal when he admitted he had exaggerated many of the details for dramatic effect.

So, a reader needs to be aware of the distance between writers' intentions, literary craft, and readers' assumptions. Writers and teachers specializing in memoir describe a process of revelation and self-discovery in which perspective and meaning evolve with time and reflection.

Thus, memoir can be very different from recording sequential, factual history in a tone of detached authority.

II. CONFLICT

Conflict is essential to narrative. A story requires action—plot. The characters' motives and behavior should justify their actions in a believable way. Something has to be at stake to make the plot move toward a climax and sustain readers' interest in the outcome. Writers create tension and suspense by arranging conflict in a story.

What happens in a conflict can involve physical obstacles; verbal disagreements; or mental, emotional, and moral problems.

There are several classic conflicts in literature and drama:

- character vs. character, the most important being the protagonist against an antagonist
- character vs. self, in which a character struggles with personality traits, feelings, secrets, beliefs, or crises of conscience
- character vs. nature, in which the setting or some natural force is the challenge
- character vs. society, in which oppression, injustice, or conflicting roles motivate action
- character vs. the supernatural, including an unworldly force, fantasy, or horror
- character vs. machine, pitting a human against a mechanical or technological threat
- character vs. fate, in which a person's will and choices are overpowered by a predetermined destiny.

Frank McCourt addresses several conflicts in his memoir. Family loyalty creates conflict with his alcoholic father, desperate mother, and unlikable relatives.

Young Frank struggles with himself over religious and political precepts of self-sacrifice. A child's normal optimism about life becomes overwhelmed by death; three siblings die in infancy. His father is obsessed with dying as a rebel soldier for Irish independence. The Catholic Church preaches about religious martyrdom. Frank goes through puberty ashamed of his body, with no sex education or friendships with girls. His first guilt-ridden love affair is with a girl dying of tuberculosis. He steals to survive. Finally, his goal of returning to the United States means thinking and acting in self-interests when his instinct is for self-sacrifice.

The rain and cold in Ireland is a malignant natural force magnifying poverty and disease.

The memoir's setting during the Great Depression concentrates on social conflict. Besides economic catastrophe, the McCourts face hostility peculiar to Irish society. Historic prejudices divide the Northern and Southern Irish, Protestants and Catholics, royal loyalists and rebellious militants, and upper and lower classes. All of these divisions appear in employment, public charity, schools, and churches.

The Catholic religion is the dominant force in Limerick, influencing personal and social behavior. Parishioners are expected to conform, yet poverty creates ethical dilemmas. Other boys become skeptics, defying priests' admonitions that they are doomed to hell as sinners. Frank's bitter mother, Angela, considers life in Limerick to be hell. Frank McCourt has a crisis of faith after his young lover Theresa dies. On his sixteenth birthday, he confesses his lifetime of hardships and guilt to a kindly priest. The priest's empathy restores Frank's spirit.

III. VOICE

In literature, voice refers to an author's distinctive qualities and style. Voice includes sensibility and attitude as well as writing techniques. Voice expresses a persona—the idea that the author or narrator is a character as well. A writer's voice and persona may be sincere and direct, or they could be an artful creation to complement the text.

Writers also differentiate characters by giving them identifiable voices.

Diction, sentence and narrative structure, imagery, and thematic preoccupations and interpretation all contribute to a recognizable voice.

In *Angela's Ashes*, Frank McCourt's first-person narration makes him the central character.

Yet, McCourt said he struggled to find his voice as a writer. For years, he was overwhelmed by anger and shame—the stigma of poverty. Then while caring for his young granddaughter, he got the idea of reverting to a child's perspective. One day he drafted the passage in which he was three years old and playing on the seesaw with brother Malachy in the Brooklyn playground. He found this first-person technique recaptured the honesty, exuberance, and humor of children. The memoir finally flowed.

Many incidents reflect McCourt's perspective at a particular age. As the memoir progresses chronologically, his boyhood perspective reflects growing awareness and understanding of characters and events. Descriptions contain more details and analysis. Young Frank begins to plot his own future.

McCourt's narration has an adult persona as well. He uses irony throughout the memoir to reflect his mature attitude about his life. His ambivalent attitude about his parents' marriage and his miserable childhood is established in the introductory paragraphs. Of course, both he and his book exist because of his parents' mistakes and the historical backdrop.

- Verbal irony is a statement with an intended meaning that is different or opposite to what is literally said. Irony may be expressed as understatement, exaggeration, contrast, sarcasm, or satire.
- Situational irony is an outcome different from what is expected. Contradiction, contrast, and incongruity are evident. Incidents may be accidental or surprising.
- Dramatic irony occurs when the reader knows more about a situation in the plot than a participating character does. This is a way of involving the reader in the story through anticipation and understanding.
- Irony is not the same as sarcasm, though sarcasm may use irony. Sarcasm is wit that conveys contempt and insult.

IV. FRANK MCCOURT'S LIFE

Angela's Ashes is Frank McCourt's recollection of his desperately poor childhood during the Great Depression in Brooklyn, New York, and Ireland. The book ends in 1949 with his return to America at age nineteen, carrying only the buoyant hope of a better life. In real life, McCourt worked at menial jobs until he was drafted into the United States Army during the Korean war.

Though he had quit school in Ireland at the age of thirteen, he was able to use the G.I. Bill to attend New York University after his military service. He graduated as a teacher and taught English and creative writing for almost thirty years in New York City high schools. He told stories about his upbringing as a means of connecting with his students.

McCourt contributed articles to the *Village Voice* newspaper, and befriended writers Pete Hamill and Jimmy Breslin. He and brother Malachy, an actor, wrote and performed a play, *A Couple of Blaguards*, based on their youth. All of the surviving McCourt brothers and their mother, Angela, eventually immigrated to the United States. After their mother's death, her sons took her ashes back to Limerick and left them on the burial plot of their twin brothers. This inspired the book's title, though the incident is not in the text.

McCourt's father never reunited with the family after his departure for England when Frank was eleven, though he sent occasional letters and visited New York once late in life.

McCourt finally wrote *Angela's Ashes* after he retired from teaching. The book became an immediate bestseller upon publication in 1996, when he was sixty-six. It won the Pulitzer Prize for biography, the National Book Critics Circle Award, the Los Angeles Times Book Award and the American Booksellers Book of the Year. McCourt received an honorary doctorate from Ireland's Limerick University in 1997.

A film version of *Angela's Ashes* was released in 1999. McCourt continued his immigrant's story in a second memoir, *Tis*, in 1999. He wrote about his classroom experiences in *Teacher Man*, published in 2005. He died in 2009 at the age of seventy-eight.

In Ireland—Limerick in particular—*Angela's Ashes* had detractors who were offended by McCourt's depiction of his overwhelmed mother, fetid slums, and seemingly heartless charity and church workers. McCourt acknowledged a few errors of memory about old acquaintances.

However, documentary evidence affirms the extent of ruin and disease McCourt described during the Depression years. His family left Brooklyn and returned to Ireland in 1935.

Social services had progressed little beyond the nineteenth-century British Poor Laws that consigned the utterly destitute to workhouses. These institutions were deliberately worse than life on the outside to dissuade their use. The attitude was that poverty was inevitable, while public relief abetted laziness and dependence, raised taxes, and upset labor markets. In 1922, the newly created Irish Free State (free of English rule in the south twenty-six counties) changed the workhouses into "county homes" and "clinics for the poor." They were still a last resort. In McCourt's memoir, going to the City Home and Dispensary became unavoidable.

As long-term unemployment increased, the Irish parliament imposed harsh eligibility rules that reduced payouts of "the dole." Religious prejudice colored availability of jobs and benefits. Catholics faced discrimination in the six northern Protestant-dominated counties of Ulster that remained loyal to Britain. Protestants were scorned by the Catholic majority in south Ireland.

The Catholic lay volunteer Society of St. Vincent de Paul was the dominant charity, and it emphasized spiritual rectitude as well as material aid. It was woefully underfunded compared to the population's meager wages, widespread unemployment, and desperate need. In 1944, the Limerick society spent more than it received in donations to supply children's boots, clothing, bedding, and heating fuel.

In a poor country, Limerick's housing was among the most decrepit, with little new construction. Townhouses dating to 1800 stood in decay along the Shannon River as tenements for the poor. In 1926, Limerick's population was 39,500, yet there were only about six thousand houses. Nearly two thousand houses were deemed unfit for habitation. Inertia reigned.

In 1942, the Limerick city council authorized a building survey of the lanes, in preparation for slum clearance. Inspectors enumerated cramped twenty-foot-wide houses with leaking roofs, ceilings, and walls, and broken cement and earthen floors, many of which were below street level and flooded in the frequent, heavy rains. There were no sewers to drain yards and streets, no bathrooms, and no heating other than fireplaces.

Ireland was rife with tuberculosis, typhoid, and infant and maternal deaths—boasting the worst mortality rate in Western Europe. Until the 1950s, women usually gave birth at home, attended by midwives. Contraceptives, abortion, and publications with information about these subjects were officially banned, in accord with Catholic edicts. (Until 1973, the Irish constitution recognized the “special position” of the Catholic church in society.)

Irish law and convention forbid the employment of married women as well. Female teachers and civil servants had to resign when they married. Overall, few women had paid employment. Motherhood was their presumed role.

Limerick's hospitals dated to the early nineteenth century and were inadequate for modern medical treatment. Hospitals relied on paying patients or philanthropy. In 1930, the Irish government started a sweepstakes lottery to help fund hospitals and give free care to the poor.

A new acute medical and surgical hospital was finally built in Limerick in 1933. Construction of a full-service hospital was delayed by World War II, and opened in 1955.

The Irish government began paying children's allowances to fathers in 1944, for families' third and later children, to improve nutrition and health.

In 1947, a government-funded Mother and Child Health Service was proposed, influenced by public health oversight and social insurance in other countries. Catholic bishops objected out of fear of sexual liberalism and a socialist takeover of religious-run hospitals. The Irish Medical Association agreed with the church, because priests and nuns ran hospitals and appointed doctors. Ultimately, conservative finance officials decided a national system was too expensive.

In 1944, an American scientist discovered the antibiotic streptomycin, which was effective against tuberculosis. After World War II, Ireland undertook a tuberculosis eradication campaign that dramatically reduced the death rate. Irish health subsidies and insurance improved from the 1950s on.

Ireland had a national school system segregated by religion and gender, with mandatory attendance from six to fourteen. Catholic and Protestant schools gave religious instruction, emphasizing theology and morals as well as academics. Since the Irish Free State gained political independence from England in 1922, schools also taught the Irish language (Gaelic) to revive cultural distinctions.

In 1969, free public secondary education became available to all students. Mandatory attendance was raised to age six. School bus transportation was provided in rural areas. Teenagers took examinations to obtain Leaving Certificates from ages seventeen to nineteen. Their exam scores determined admission to Ireland's colleges and universities, on the basis of merit. Since 1997, college tuition is free, paid for by the government, though students pay fees and living expenses. Today, forty-two percent of young Irish adults are college educated. Ireland is now among the best-educated countries in the world.

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V. THE GREAT DEPRESSION

The Great Depression was a global economic crisis through the 1930s until World War II.

In the United States, the stock market collapsed in October 1929, ending a decade of manufacturing growth and modernization. But the 1920s had been uneven economically. Farming still constituted about a quarter of the U.S. work force. While World War I engulfed Europe, American farmers prospered from exports. They took on debt to increase their acreage and buy machinery. After the war ended, European agriculture rebounded to U.S. farmers' detriment. Commodity exports and prices fell, but debt remained, leading to foreclosures. Severe drought exacerbated the farm crisis.

In that period, farm products and raw materials accounted for sixty percent of global trade. Thus, many countries suffered similarly.

World War I had other consequences. Most countries backed their currencies with a standard weight in gold to facilitate payment conversion in commerce. But European nations began printing additional paper money to cover military costs, which inflated currency values. Worried investors shipped gold to the safe and stable United States.

After the war, countries like Britain and France deflated their currency by returning to the gold standard. This stalled international trade because there was a limited gold supply to exchange. Unemployment spread.

By 1933, twenty-five percent of American workers were jobless as economic production and prices plummeted. Banks failed, operating credit dried up, and spending stopped. There was little economic regulation or relief for communities and families.

U.S. President Herbert Hoover encouraged public construction projects and offered government loans to shaky banks, insurance companies, and railroads. High tariffs on imports—intended to protect American producers—hurt other countries and led to retaliation against U.S. exports. The U.S. Federal Reserve raised interest rates to keep gold reserves in this country. Hoover cut taxes, but raised them again in 1932 to avoid a budget deficit.

In 1933, newly elected President Franklin D. Roosevelt launched his famous New Deal initiative with public works to create jobs, stock market and banking reforms, and the creation of Social Security insurance. The gold exchange requirement was lifted. The federal government's involvement in economics increased to an unprecedented level.

In Great Britain, unemployment reached 20% by 1930. British coal, steel, textiles, and ship-building had lost foreign markets since World War I. The British government abandoned the gold standard in 1931, and economic recovery began. By the mid-1930s, southern England revived on the strength of public and suburban housing construction and new industries manufacturing automobiles and electric appliances. But northern England, Scotland, and Wales were stagnant. The advent of World War II absorbed workers into the armed forces and munitions industries.

Ireland's economy was linked to Britain's policies. Virtually all Irish exports went to Britain—primarily agricultural products like beer, flour, bacon, butter, and beef cattle. Two-thirds of the Irish worked on farms. As Frank McCourt wrote, Limerick's only industries were a flour mill, a cement plant, gas works, and coal docks. In northern Ireland around the city of Belfast, ship construction and linen textile manufacture became obsolete as transportation, the military, and consumer fashions modernized. Irish unemployment approached 30% by the late 1930s.

Political hostility made matters worse. From 1932 to 1938, the Irish and English governments were embroiled in an Economic War over which had authority to collect Irish farmers' mortgage payments for land purchased from British landlords. British government loans had enabled this land reform. Yet Irish politicians asserted their independence by withholding the funds. The British government retaliated with a 20% tariff and quotas on Irish imports, to make up the lost money. In response the Irish government imposed tariffs on British goods, particularly coal, cement, steel, and machines. The Irish paid the bigger price as their exports withered and imports cost more. A payment agreement finally restored trade.

Ireland remained neutral in World War II and was severely cut off from coal, oil, and food imports. German submarines and planes attacked shipping lanes. Living standards declined further. Irish emigration to British war factories and military service provided a way to survive.

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VI. THE HERO CUCHULAIN

Cuchulain (Coo-HOOL-in) was a warrior hero in ancient Irish mythology and folktales traced back to the first century B.C. He was an extraordinary defender against all enemies and invaders, in service to the king of Ulster. Cuchulain is an archetype—a model character that can be reinterpreted to represent a type of experience or knowledge about life.

In 1902, Lady Augusta Gregory researched and wrote the stories in *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*, a modern Irish-language edition. Lady Gregory was a key figure in the revival of Irish folklore, literature, and theater that coincided with nationalist politics.

In Ireland's intractable political history, Cuchulain became an emblem to both Irish nationalists and Ulster separatists into modern times. A sculpture depicting the dying Cuchulain commemorates the 1916 Easter Rising assault at the Dublin Post Office.

The stories about Cuchulain that young Frank McCourt heard from his father hearken to Malachy Sr.'s roots in County Antrim in the province of Ulster and his sentiments as an Irish Republican Army fugitive.

The IRA, Irish Republican Army, was a guerrilla military force intent on overthrowing British rule in all of Ireland. The IRA was a radical offshoot of the Irish Volunteers, who had plotted Dublin's Easter Rising in April 1916 to seize independence. Though British repression and civil war followed, an Irish election in 1918 established a separate parliament and administration in southern Ireland.

The northern Ulster region had a majority Protestant population and rejected the new southern Free State, out of fear of Catholic sectarianism and disadvantageous taxation of its industrial cities. A British treaty divided northern and southern Ireland into separate self-governing territories in 1921.

But IRA members persisted with violent terrorism. The IRA still exists today.

Cuchulain's epic legend begins when he was a child named Setanta (Se-tan-ta), son of Lugh (Loo), god of light, craftsmen and warriors, and Deichtine (DEC-tina), sister of King Conchobhar (CON-ah-war) of Ulster.

At age seven Setanta left home alone to find the king's court. He ran onto a field and beat the king's sons at the game of hurling (similar to field hockey). The king was impressed and invited Setanta to a feast. When Setanta arrived, he was attacked by a huge guard dog belonging to the smith Culann (KU-lan). Setanta batted his hurling ball down the dog's throat and killed it. The boy promised the angry smith that he would guard Culann's house in the dog's place, and so became known as Cuchulain—Culann's Hound.

One auspicious day, the little boy heard a prophecy that anyone who took up arms then would become a famous warrior. The child tested every implement in the armory. Only the king's weapons and chariot were strong enough for Cuchulain. But the prophecy also said his life would be short. At seventeen, he stopped an invading army sent to steal a prize bull, a trial known as the Cattle Raid of Cooley. For months, Cuchulain challenged and defeated every enemy warrior in man-to-man combat.

As a man, Cuchulain was terrifying in battle. His magic sword and spear were always fatal. Cuchulain was eventually wounded himself by one of his own spears flung back by an enemy. He tied himself to a tall rock so that he would die on his feet. Not until a raven landed on Cuchulain's shoulder did his enemies believe he was dead.

The rebel songs that Frank McCourt's father sang echo this bravado. The song about Kevin Barry hails an eighteen-year-old medical student and IRA member who took part in street attacks on British soldiers in Dublin. Barry was arrested, beaten in jail, and hanged in 1920. British authorities refused to extend mercy for his youth, despite mass public protests against the death sentence. Dozens more IRA insurgents were executed as well.

The ballad of Roddy McCorley celebrates a soldier in the Irish Rebellion of 1798. The uprising was inspired by the American and French revolutions and was brutally suppressed. Roddy McCorley was hanged in 1800. His descendant Roger McCorley was an IRA commander in Belfast, the principal city in Ulster, during the war for independence from 1919 to 1922.

VII. IRELAND VS. ENGLAND

English domination of Ireland began in 1169, when ships landed an army of Norman French and Welsh nobles, knights, and archers near Waterford. They came as allies of Dermot MacMurrough, the deposed king of Leinster who wanted to reclaim his territory from a rival. England's King Henry II approved the allied mission for his own purpose, as a way to invade and conquer Ireland. Richard de Clare, the English Earl of Pembroke known as Strongbow, joined the force on the promise that he would marry Dermot's daughter and inherit the kingdom.

In 1172, Henry II came to Ireland himself, took the title Lord of Ireland, and demanded loyalty oaths from the Irish and Norman lords to stifle their independence.

English laws ruled the colonists. In 1297, an Irish parliament was created. But medieval government gave authority to English-born administrators rather than aristocratic descendants who adapted to the Irish populace. Wars, wreckage, famine, and poverty devastated the country. Actual English control shrunk to an area around Dublin and a few eastern coastal towns.

In 1366, the Statutes of Kilkenny outlawed any assimilation between the English and Irish; including marriage; taking of Irish names; or use of the language, clothing styles, and customs. Traveling Irish poets and musicians were regarded as spies.

In 1495, English law decreed that no Irish parliament could assemble until the English king was informed, granted permission, and approved of all proposed legislation.

In 1534, King Henry VIII of England began confiscating Irish rebels' territories and awarding plantations to loyal settlers from England and Scotland. The transplanted Scots were Protestant Presbyterians. All Irish lords had to surrender their land in order to receive it back under royal charter.

Henry VIII, though a Catholic, made himself head of the Church of England when Pope Clement VII refused to annul the king's marriage to Catherine of Aragon, so he could marry Anne Boleyn. Protestant reformers aggravated the political and religious turmoil.

In 1542, Henry VIII declared himself and his successors the kings and queens of Ireland.

From 1553 to 1558, Queen Mary I (Henry VIII's daughter) restored Catholicism as England's official religion. Protestants were executed.

Then Queen Elizabeth I, Henry VIII's Protestant daughter, became queen. In 1559, England's Parliament passed the Act of Supremacy, which made the English monarch—and not the pope—head of the Church of England. The Act of Uniformity required people to attend Sunday worship at Anglican churches or be fined.

In 1570, Pope Pius V declared Elizabeth I a heretic and threatened excommunication of Catholics loyal to her. In 1580, Pope Gregory XIII stated that Catholics should obey Elizabeth I in civil affairs until she could be overthrown. The English government regarded Catholics as traitors.

From 1595 to 1603, Hugh O'Neil (who was Queen Elizabeth I's deputy in Ireland's northern Ulster region) led a revolt. The Irish rebels were allied with Catholic Spain, England's enemy. After military defeat, O'Neil and other nobles fled into exile in Europe. Martial law was imposed.

The plantation system continued, bringing Protestant settlers from France and the Netherlands as well. More Protestants from Scotland spread from Belfast over the northern Ulster region. Colonists included wealthy landlords, farm tenants, skilled craftsmen, and soldiers. Protestants also gained seats in the Irish parliament.

In 1641, Irish Catholic landowners rebelled. A power struggle between King Charles I and England's Parliament over the right to levy taxes—as well as Protestant vs. Catholic domination—embroiled the Irish as well. Civil war in England and Scotland from 1642 to 1648 ended with Charles I's defeat, a parliamentary trial, and the king's execution.

In 1649, English leader Oliver Cromwell (who replaced King Charles I as head of state) invaded Ireland to reconquer it. The military campaign was notorious for its massacres of Irish resistors to British rule. In 1652, all Catholic land was confiscated as punishment for the revolt. Catholic priests were executed, and the religion was banned. Thousands of Irish were exiled as slaves to Caribbean sugar plantations and the American colonies.

In 1658, Cromwell died. In 1660, Charles II (son of Charles I) was invited to return to England from exile in France. Charles II re-established the monarchy.

In 1685, his Catholic brother, James II, succeeded him as king and sought to reinstate Catholicism and royal power in England.

In 1688, King James II was deposed. Protestants William III and Mary of Holland (Mary was James II's daughter) were made king and queen of England and Ireland. A Bill of Rights gave power to Parliament, especially the power to levy taxes. To ensure Protestant heirs to the throne, no Catholic could become monarch, and no monarch could marry a Catholic. Catholics were denied any government role.

In 1689, James II came to Ireland with an army of French soldiers, to muster Irish loyalists and recapture the throne. King William III followed with his army and warships. James II was defeated and returned to exile in France.

In 1691, the Treaty of Limerick promised surrendering Irish soldiers safe passage to France with their families; the Catholic religion would be tolerated; and land would not be confiscated. The Protestant-controlled parliament, however, ignored the treaty.

Between 1695 and 1704, Ireland's parliament passed Penal Codes decreeing that Catholics could not hold government office, vote, join the army or navy, practice law or medicine, teach school, or send a child abroad to be educated. Catholics could not own a weapon or valuable horse, nor could they move into certain cities. Parish priests could remain, but Catholic bishops and monks were ordered to leave Ireland. Marriage between Catholics and Protestants was forbidden. Catholics could not buy land. Land had to be divided equally among Catholic sons upon their father's death, so Catholic families would eventually be impoverished as each generation depended upon an ever-decreasing parcel of land for income and sustenance. Penalties included fines, seizure of property, and death. By the late eighteenth century, only 5% of Ireland's land was owned by the Irish.

In 1729, Jonathan Swift wrote the satire "A Modest Proposal" about Ireland's poor children. Swift was a political commentator and Anglican Protestant clergyman from Dublin.

The American and French revolutions of 1776 and 1789, respectively, were inspirations for rebellion. The dispossessed Irish formed secret societies to enact vigilante justice and discuss political goals.

In 1793, Catholics were allowed to vote but could not be elected members of England's Parliament.

In 1801, the Union with Ireland Act made Ireland and England one kingdom with one Parliament—so that the Irish would not break free in their own assembly.

In 1828, Daniel O'Connell, a Catholic, was elected to Parliament to represent Ireland's County Clare. This was a test of so-called Catholic emancipation. To avoid confrontation, in 1829, the Parliament passed the Catholic Relief Act, which abolished most restrictions and allowed O'Connell to hold office.

Then between 1845 and 1849, Ireland's poor farmers faced famine when potato crops rotted due to a fast-spreading mold. Unable to afford other food or find employment, nearly a million people died. Relief efforts to provide imported food and public works projects were delayed and overruled because England's treasurer insisted that economic markets should be free of interference.

This brought a wave of Irish immigrants to the United States. Nearly two million people—about a quarter of Ireland's population—came here by 1855.

Irish immigrants and soldiers who served in the American Civil War formed the secret Fenian Brotherhood. The Fenians were linked to the revolutionary Irish Republican Brotherhood back in their native land. Besides raising money to buy weapons, military veterans returned to Ireland to plot attacks in pursuit of independence. (*Fenian* derives from *fianna*, meaning *soldiers* in the Irish language.)

Charles Parnell was an Irish Protestant and member of the British Parliament who championed independent self-government—called home rule. He began with land reform. Between 1879 and 1882, Parnell led a rent boycott of farmers against landlords. Violence and scandal tainted the cause. However, Parliament passed several Land Purchase Acts whereby the English government bought out landlords and allowed Irish farmers to buy acreage with government-funded mortgages.

In northern Ireland, Ulster Protestants organized and campaigned against home rule and in favor of continued union with England rather than empower a Catholic-controlled Irish government. Factions multiplied, including extremists who believed national independence was an all-or-nothing imperative.

The British Parliament finally approved independence for Ireland in 1914, to take effect after World War I ended. Negotiations to allow northern Ulster counties to be excluded from home rule stopped.

In 1916, a secret group plotted an Easter takeover of the Dublin Post Office and fought police and soldiers for a week. The Easter Rising caused hundreds of police, military and civilian casualties, followed by mass arrests and executions of the plot leaders. Public revulsion toward the radicals gave way to nationalist sympathy.

The 1918 Irish election resulted in a majority of the chosen representatives refusing to take office in England. They formed an Irish parliament in Dublin instead.

The Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 created the Irish Free State of twenty-six southern counties. Six northern counties remained part of Great Britain. A civil war between the southern Irish Republic and northern Ireland was fought until 1923 over extremists' repudiation of any connection to the British Commonwealth of former colonies.

In 1949, southern Ireland quit the British Commonwealth and became completely independent, with no allegiance to English royalty.

However, political stalemate and criminal violence continued to tear the country. British soldiers were sent back into Northern Ireland's "Troubles" in 1969 because of Irish Republican Army attacks. Northern Ireland's government was taken over in 1971. In 1998, a Good Friday peace agreement was reached, but the process of stabilizing Irish-British relations is still not complete.

Topics for Discussion and Essays

1. How can a reader evaluate honesty and authenticity in writing?
2. What factors should be considered before writing about someone's life? About one's own life?
3. What are the advantages of living in a homogenous society? What are the disadvantages?
4. What circumstances justify challenging authority or social conformity?
5. How do stereotypes arise? What is their effect?
6. What sacrifices should one be willing to make to achieve a goal? Does achieving a worthy goal justify even immoral, unethical, or illegal means?

Free Response (Essay) Items

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE ITEM 1

Carefully read the passage from Chapter 1 of Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*, beginning: "When Dad brings home the first week's wages ..." and ending: "The twins cry and Mam shushes them and cries a long time herself." Then write a thoughtful and well-supported essay analyzing how the author controls the pace of the incident. Be sure to consider literary techniques such as diction, sentence structure, point of view, and persona.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE ITEM 2

Carefully read the passage from Chapter 2 of Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*, beginning: "Eugene is sleeping under a coat on the bed," and ending: "It was so quiet I put my head on the table and fell asleep." Then write a well-supported essay analyzing how the childlike perspective develops the narrative's meaning and themes. Do not simply summarize incidents.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE ITEM 3

Carefully read the passage from Chapter 4 of Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*, beginning: "First Communion day is the happiest day of your life," and ending: "and that was the end of my First Communion day." Then write a well-reasoned and -supported essay in which you analyze the sources of humor in this episode. Do not simply summarize plot details. Be sure to consider diction, tone, pace, point of view, and persona along with the narrative elements.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE ITEM 4

Carefully read the passage from Chapter 10 of Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*, beginning: "It is cold and wet down in Ireland," and ending: "the priests of the world banging on the door and disturbing us." Then write an essay analyzing the author's attitude toward spiritual matters, and how the theme appears in the narrative. Do not merely summarize the plot.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE ITEM 5

Carefully read the passage from Chapter 16 of Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*, beginning: "Mrs. O'Connell gives me telegrams," and ending: "Frank McCourt, struck a blow." Then write an essay that identifies stereotypes and analyzes the author's treatment of the subject matter. Be sure to consider persona, tone, and theme along with narrative elements.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE ITEM 6

In society and literature, characters often compare themselves to heroes that represent the ideals and aspirations of the character. Select a character of Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* and write a well-supported essay that analyzes the effect of a hero on the narrative and the character's development.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE ITEM 7

Social rejection is an enduring theme in literature, affecting characters, settings, actions, or attitudes. Write a well-supported essay describing how Frank McCourt interprets this theme in *Angela's Ashes*. Be sure to consider the author's stance and literary techniques along with narrative elements. Do not merely summarize the plot.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE ITEM 8

Holidays are useful literary settings because they place characters in a familiar, meaningful, and emotionally-laden context. Write a well-supported essay analyzing how Frank McCourt exploits the narrative and dramatic potential of holidays in his memoir, *Angela's Ashes*.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE ITEM 9

A memoir is an intimate yet selective exchange between author and audience. In this genre, authors reconsider their own lives as they write, finding meaning in their experiences. Readers evaluate memoirs on the basis of interest, honesty, and insight. In a well-supported essay, analyze the structure and literary techniques of Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* that reveal the author's response to incidents and focus readers on their significance.

Practice Multiple-Choice Questions

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 1-5:

Carefully read the passage from Chapter 1 of Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* beginning: "I'm in a playground on Classon Avenue," and ending, "They get their appetites because they are starving half the time." Then choose the best answers to the multiple-choice questions below.

1. As the passage begins, the author establishes a child's persona by using
 - A. first-person narration.
 - B. simple sentence structure.
 - C. the playground setting.
 - D. his mother's intervention.
 - E. his guilty conscience.
2. The analogy stating "Malachy has dog blood and the dog has Malachy blood" indicates
 - A. literal observation.
 - B. limited vocabulary.
 - C. logical error.
 - D. symbolic connotations.
 - E. poetic imagery.
3. The narrator's assertion that his dad cannot tell the Cuchulain story to other children implies
 - A. brother Malachy was too young to understand it.
 - B. the narrator had few privileges as a child.
 - C. Hercules and Achilles were better-known legends.
 - D. the child was curious about his Irish heritage.
 - E. the tale is a bond with his father.
4. The description comparing the young brothers' appearance and demeanor reflects the
 - A. brothers' rivalry.
 - B. child's impertinence.
 - C. neighbor's opinion.
 - D. parents' conflict.
 - E. narrator's maturity.
5. The narrator's wish to "swing up into the sky" and "fly around the world" marks a transition in tone from
 - A. mischievous to stern.
 - B. innocence to envy.
 - C. confusion to comprehension.
 - D. obedience to rebellion.
 - E. selfishness to selflessness.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 6-10:

Carefully read the passage from Chapter 3, of Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*, beginning: "The angel that brought Margaret," and ending: "the St. Vincent de Paul Society gave the gift of shoes." Then choose the best answers to the multiple-choice questions below.

6. The Angel of the Seventh Step is an example of
 - A. colloquialism.
 - B. metaphor.
 - C. euphemism.
 - D. personification.
 - E. paradox.
7. The father's definition of "affliction" implies that his attitude is
 - A. didactic.
 - B. bitter.
 - C. condescending.
 - D. mocking.
 - E. skeptical.
8. The epithet, "Mr. Grand Manner," characterizes the father as a(n)
 - A. gentleman.
 - B. savior.
 - C. expert.
 - D. pretender.
 - E. idealist.
9. The father's pride, which resists "begging" for charity, is contradicted by
 - A. his scorn of the snobbish doctor.
 - B. calling the dry upstairs room Italy.
 - C. complaining about the filthy lavatory.
 - D. insisting the old shoes be worn.
 - E. relying on the dole while jobless.
10. The teacher uses the image of shoeless Jesus on the cross to evoke a sense of _____ in his students.
 - A. sacrifice.
 - B. deprivation.
 - C. empathy.
 - D. reverence.
 - E. punishment.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 11-15:

Carefully read the passage from Chapter 8 of Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*, beginning: "I cannot stay at home forever," and ending: "your mind is a palace." Then choose the best answers to the multiple-choice questions below.

11. The mother's choice of words in conversations with the headmaster and her son, the narrator, stresses
 - A. generalization.
 - B. emotionalism.
 - C. understatement.
 - D. invective.
 - E. compromise.
12. Mr. O'Dea's composition assignment is an example of situational irony because
 - A. Jesus was in fact Jewish.
 - B. the composition title trivializes the topic.
 - C. Frank's father detests living in Limerick.
 - D. Frank argued consumption would kill Jesus.
 - E. Frank exceeds the teacher's expectations.
13. The boy's gratitude to St. Francis for causing him to be promoted at school reinforces the main idea of the passage that
 - A. an older boy should move ahead.
 - B. staying in the class did not hurt.
 - C. being the saint's namesake is significant.
 - D. his parents did not help him at school.
 - E. he undervalued his own intelligence.
14. In the last paragraph, the metaphor comparing the mind to a house is reiterated in an
 - A. allusion.
 - B. analogy.
 - C. allegory.
 - D. oxymoron.
 - E. epigram.
15. The impression of the headmaster in the first and last paragraphs can best be distinguished as
 - A. apologetic vs. assertive.
 - B. authoritarian vs. inspirational.
 - C. vague vs. poetic.
 - D. rigid vs. radical.
 - E. obtuse vs. ingratiating.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 16-20:

Carefully read the passage from Chapter 14 of Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*, beginning: "The day before my fourteenth birthday," and ending: "Well, she says, that's more than your father would do." Then select the best answers to the multiple-choice questions below.

16. In the second paragraph, the narrator's concern about his shoulders is described using
 - A. antithesis.
 - B. euphony.
 - C. hyperbole.
 - D. simile.
 - E. motif.
17. Suspense is sustained throughout this passage by
 - A. the boy's fourteenth birthday.
 - B. the shabby laundry.
 - C. fooling the Abbot.
 - D. worrying about Aunt Aggie.
 - E. fear of Grandma's ghost.
18. The pace of the scene is created and maintained by the
 - A. chronology.
 - B. conflict.
 - C. syntax.
 - D. dialogue.
 - E. characterization.
19. The climax or high point of this passage is
 - A. finding Grandma's dress in the wardrobe.
 - B. Aunt Aggie's pulling off Frank's blankets.
 - C. Frank's telling his aunt he has a job.
 - D. Kathleen Purcell's seeing Frank in the backyard.
 - E. Uncle Pa Keating's kneeling for a blessing.
20. The conclusion of this passage emphasizes
 - A. hilarity.
 - B. cunning.
 - C. embarrassment.
 - D. generosity.
 - E. reconciliation.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 21-25:

Carefully read the passage from Chapter 16 of Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*, beginning: "There's a telegram for an old woman," and ending: "I shake my head and walk up the street where a smart boy is wanted." Then select the best answers to the multiple-choice questions that follow:

21. From the passage, a reader can infer that Mrs. Finucane's definition of intelligence is
 - A. literacy.
 - B. maturity.
 - C. cynicism.
 - D. shrewdness.
 - E. logic.
22. The statement "I have no money so I have to help myself" has a double meaning referring to
 - A. opportunity.
 - B. optimism.
 - C. coincidence.
 - D. survival.
 - E. morality.
23. Mrs. Finucane's wish to have Masses said for the repose of her soul is ironic because
 - A. she happily anticipates death.
 - B. she will not hear the Masses.
 - C. she is a ruthless miser.
 - D. her church donations are stolen.
 - E. her customers curse her.
24. The phrase "a Brigid" is used as
 - A. stereotype.
 - B. metaphor.
 - C. metonymy.
 - D. parody.
 - E. persona.
25. After Frank decides against taking the post office exam, the tone of the last paragraph is
 - A. assured.
 - B. aggressive.
 - C. exuberant.
 - D. subdued.
 - E. ambivalent.

Multiple-Choice Answers with Explanations

1. Persona refers to the depiction of character, or a narrator's façade or assumed role. Authors may use first-person narration at any stage of life, so (A) can be eliminated. The author is an adult recalling anecdotes about the Brooklyn playground and his mother's supervision, (C) and (D), for a purpose. These memories show a child's innocence, rather than a guilty conscience, (E). After all, the little boy Frankie did not know what he had done wrong after his brother was injured. **The best answer is simple diction and sentence structure to mimic a child-like personality, (B).**
2. An analogy is a comparison that identifies similarities between different things. The anecdote about the dead dog in the gutter is told from a child's perspective, so the vocabulary is limited, (B). Nonetheless, there is some resemblance between the injured animal and the little brother. So it is not a logical error, (C). But the boy isn't yet sophisticated enough to infer symbolism and poetic imagery, (D) and (E). **The child's analogy is most likely a literal observation, (A).**
3. In his child's persona, the narrator cherishes the Cuchulain myth at its basic level, as being about a heroic boy and a big dog. Even little brother Malachy can understand it (A). After all, Malachy corrects Frankie's claim that the Brooklyn dog was killed by a ball rather than a car. The passage does suggest the narrator grew up with few material privileges or individual attention, (B). But it is clear that sitting in Dad's lap to hear a story is a familiar ritual because the child asked him to repeat a tale he knew. The popularity of Hercules and Achilles does not explain Frankie's possessiveness of Cuchulain, (C). While the myth's Irish origin is noted, (D), **the cozy moment between father and son suggests the tale is a special bond between them, (E).**
4. The description of the two brothers is part of the exposition, indicating the characters' attitudes toward each other. Young Frankie actually admires Malachy's good looks and charming mannerisms, so (A) is incorrect. Frankie's persona is subdued, whereas impertinence means inappropriately exuberant, (B). The boys' mother gave her opinion about Frankie's "odd manner" to the neighbor, not the other way around, (C). The narrator speaks as a child, not as his mature self, (E). **The overall impression is that his unhappy mother disapproves of a trait that resembles his father, (D).**
5. As the passage progresses, the sentence structure and thoughts expressed become more complex. Keep in mind the narrator was that innocent, bewildered, self-centered (E) child in Brooklyn. None of the poignant incidents suggest malicious mischief (A), envy (B) or disobedience (D). The transition marks the boy's growing awareness of life around him, and why things happen. **From the child's perspective, he goes from confusion to comprehension, (C).**

6. The explanation that angels deliver babies on the stairway is meant to keep children ignorant of the facts of conception, pregnancy, and childbirth. This elevated fiction is not an informal colloquialism or poetic comparison, (A) or (B). (C) might be tempting, but a euphemism is not an altogether inaccurate or fictional softening of the truth. A paradox is a contradictory statement that makes sense, (E). **Personification means attributing human qualities to objects, animals, or ideas, (D), which this fanciful explanation does.**
7. *Affliction* actually means suffering and distress. The father's retort to his curious children seems harsher than the situation warrants. Didactic (A) means inclined to teach, and the father is doing the opposite—avoiding the taboo subject of childbirth, and silencing questions. Condescending (C) implies toleration of an inferior, and also still implies some level of genuine explanation. While he does not really answer the children's question, nor does he mock or ridicule them, (D). He does not express disbelief (E). **The father's rebuke implies he is bitter and overwhelmed by burdens (B).**
8. In the context of this passage, the epithet, "Mr. Grand Manner," is sarcasm. The father's scruples about charity clash with the mother's realism. A gentleman would be more consistent in his stated belief and his behavior (A). A savior (B) would take whatever steps are necessary to rescue those who depended on him. An expert (D) is exceptionally knowledgeable or skilled in something, and the father does not seem to have any practical expertise. (E) might tempt some because the father is fanciful, but this has nothing to do with his bearing, attitudes, or behavior. **The mother scorns her husband for pretending to be superior despite their poverty. Thus, (D) is the best answer.**
9. The father's pride comes through when he revives the sick baby and dismisses the need for a doctor (A). There is nothing inconsistent between resisting social charity and attempting to make a horrible situation better through humor and imagination (B). Complaining about the filthy lavatory is distasteful but justified (C). His inept repair of the boys' old shoes causes humiliation at school, but the father disregards this (D). **Yet the root cause of their poverty is the father's inability to get a job and his inadequate unemployment benefits (E).**
10. In Christian theology, the image of Jesus on the cross represents bodily sacrifice to redeem mankind's sins, (A) and (D). The schoolroom incident is specifically about the poor McCourt brothers' lack of decent shoes, (B). While the teacher insists the students obey his admonition or be punished, (E), **his instructional purpose is to evoke empathy, (C). His point is that the shoeless poor resemble the shoeless Christ.**
11. Frank's mother does not persuade the headmaster that he is ready for sixth grade despite his long illness from typhoid fever. Neither does she resort to the generalization (A) that Frank is like other students. She ignores Frank's emotional appeals (B). She insults no one, thus eliminating (D). The headmaster prevails, and then the mother prevails over Frank, so there is no compromise (E). **The mother does use understatement to minimize Frank's two-month absence and the impact of repeating a grade (C).**

12. Mr. O'Dea's premise is that Jesus would not have died in Limerick because the Irish were devout Catholics, and crucifixion was cruel and unusual punishment. The teacher's directions do not take into consideration the fact that Jesus was a Jew and Jews were, in fact, persecuted in the British Isles (A). The composition title is childishly simplistic (B). Frank's thinking is tangentially influenced by his father's hatred of dreary Limerick, but not strongly enough for (C) to be the most compelling response. Mr. O'Dea expects Frank to write well since he taught the boy the year before (E). **The irony is that Frank refutes the teacher's premise by citing geography, sociology, and theology (D).**
13. This passage contrasts the rigid school system of rote memory to more inspiring instruction. Frank feels entitled to promotion because he is an older boy, (A), though staying in the fifth class does not seem to hurt him, (B). After all, he wrote a good essay. Frank believes divine intervention made the difference since his parents simply acquiesced to the school, (C) and (D). **The real revelation is that his intelligence impressed his teachers, (E). The scarcity of praise and encouragement makes him doubt his ability.**
14. Comparisons of the mind to a house run through the last paragraph. An allusion (A) is a reference to something outside the text. An allegory (C) is a story with symbolic meaning. An oxymoron (D) is a self-contradictory statement. An epigram (E) is a witty saying. **An analogy (B) is like a metaphor in that both literary devices are comparisons of similarities. The headmaster uses the example of winning the Irish Sweepstakes, yet wasting that sudden wealth by furnishing a house with rubbish.**
15. As the passage progresses, the narrator's perception of the headmaster's personality changes. This question asks the reader to detect differences in the character's persona from beginning to end. In the first paragraph, Mr. O'Halloran says "sorry" to Frank's mother out of conventional politeness, while firmly deciding the boy will be kept back a grade. So he is always assertive rather than vague, (A) and (C). His attitude might seem rigid at first, but his respect for knowledge and truth cannot be considered radical extremism (D). Obtuse means stupid, while ingratiating means a pleasing manner (E). Neither adjective is apt. **The best contrast is authoritarian vs. inspirational (B).**
16. The narrator's boyish preoccupation with his thin shoulders stretches into a generalization about the whole world, the scrutiny of all the women in Limerick, and miraculous intercession by God and heavyweight boxer Joe Louis. **This extreme exaggeration is the epitome of hyperbole. Thus, (C) is the correct answer.** Antithesis (A) is a statement that places two contrasting ideas or images in close proximity. Euphony (B) is melodious sound in the writing. Simile (D) is a poetic comparison using like or as. A motif (E) is a recurring element, often with symbolic importance.
17. This passage begins with pathos but turns into comedy using incongruity and suspense. The fact that it is the boy's fourteenth birthday (A) and his waiting for his ragged laundry to dry (B), provide the set-up for the comedy. His conniving uncle, the Abbot (C), and the ghost of Grandma (D) raise the stakes. **The running theme, though, is worrying about what nasty Aunt Aggie will do (D).**

18. The comedic action tends to happen quickly. Chronology (A) does not imply speed. The conflict (B) and characterization (E) build slowly earlier in the passage, in order to explode here. The dialogue (D) flows quickly once the characters collide. **The run-on sentence structure—the syntax (C)—mimics the rapid turn of events when the adults surprise the sleeping boy.**
19. The scene's climax is the tipping point. The action can rise no higher, and the resolution becomes inevitable. Finding Grandma's dress in the wardrobe (A) still escalates the action. Explaining the pending job (C), being seen by Kathleen Purcell in the backyard (D), and enduring Pa Keating's mockery (E) are all part of the conclusion. The climax is clearly indicated by the clue: "the worst thing of all," which begins the episode of Aunt Aggie's pulling off the blankets. **Thus, (B) is the best answer.**
20. This passage has a maudlin beginning, cunning rising action (B), and a hilarious turning point (A). The poor boy is embarrassed (C) to be discovered wearing his dead Grandma's dress, but he resigns himself to the consequent torture. Afterward, Aunt Aggie's invitation to have tea can hardly be considered generous (D). **However, since Frank worried she would throw him out of the house, her reaction to his job plans at the end of the passage constitutes reconciliation (E).**
21. Mrs. Finucane, the money lender, needs a certain kind of intelligence for debt collection. She requires more than mere literacy (A), which is usually defined simply as the ability to read and write. Maturity (B) implies experienced judgment, which is not the same thing as the type of intelligence Mrs. Finucane needs. Cynicism (C) might tempt some, but this is an attitude of distrust and negativity, which, again does not necessarily translate into intelligence. In fact, cynicism may be seen as the result of a lack of intelligence. Logic (E) might also tempt some, but the ability to reason could actually hinder her assistant in his work. **What she needs, however, is a shrewd operator—someone sharp, pragmatic, and cunning, able to word the letters in the best way to intimidate the debtors. Thus, (D) is the best answer.**
22. The statement "I have no money so I have to help myself" is both literally true and a rationalization. In order to escape poverty and go to America, Frank seizes the unsavory opportunity to collect debts for Mrs. Finucane (A) and (B). It is his lucky break, abetted coincidentally (C) by the mating dogs outside the Woolsworth store, but such events are clearly not what he is saying he relies on. (D) might tempt some who recognize the ethical dilemma Frank finds himself in and his "need" to violate his own code of ethics, but it is not the best answer. "To help oneself" is a term for theft, and the issue of stealing raises for Frank several ethical and moral concerns. **Thus, (E) is the best answer.**

23. The key point is that requiem Masses are intended to intercede for the peaceful rest of the dead. Mrs. Finucane's happy anticipation of Masses she will not hear (A) and (B), might seem contrary to her miserliness (C), but this is not the most compelling answer. While she is unaware that resentful Frank is stealing from her (D), there is no irony in the fact that she still has plenty of money to buy her masses. **The situational irony is in the fact that she is anticipating heaven and eternal rest, while her frightened customers curse her as "a demon outa hell," (E).**
24. (B) might tempt some because there is a metaphoric use to the name, but it is not the most compelling answer. Metonymy (C) might also tempt a few, but using the girl's name to represent a "type" is not the same as using a part to represent the whole. Parody (D) might tempt some, but Pa Keating is not making fun of "the Brigids" or any particular girl named Brigid, only acknowledging that such a type exists. Persona (E) describes a created or artificial character or personality, and Pa Keating is not suggesting that these girls are phony or insincere. Pa Keating is, however, warning against the inevitability of a dull marriage to an Irish Catholic woman. **He labels this predictable type "a Brigid." Thus, (A) is the best answer.**
25. Frank McCourt's pivotal decision not to take the post office exam turns on the coincidence of the Easons Ltd. job posting. Frank walks to the test site, then opts out at the last minute. This behavior certainly does not suggest that he is assured (A). He stifles his aggressive impulse to insult the doorkeeper (B); he cannot be described as exuberant (C), as he is pensive and knows that his decision will disappoint and anger some of the people who know him. The repetition of the phrase "smart boy" in the last line implies Frank identifies with the role, so he is not ambivalent (E). **Rather, he quietly pursues his goal (D).**

Angela's Ashes

Chapter 1

1. Frank McCourt begins his memoir by wondering how he survived his childhood after his family returned to Ireland. What tone does McCourt use as he characterizes the conditions of his youth when he writes, "It was, of course, a miserable childhood: the happy childhood is hardly worth your while"?

McCourt's tone is ironic because happiness is undoubtedly better than misery. He mocks how "people everywhere" complain and brag about childhood unhappiness, as if it were a cliché.

He uses understatement to enumerate the harsh facts of life in Ireland, ending with "we were wet."

He also presents a paradox by saying a happy childhood is a waste of time. If he had been happy, he would not have insights into life that he intends to share with readers. (Nor would he have a story that anyone else would be interested in listening to. He is justifying the value of his experience and his memoir.

2. What is the Feast of the Circumcision? How does this allusion contribute to the description of Limerick's weather?

On the Christian liturgical calendar, the Feast of the Circumcision refers to the circumcision of the infant Jesus eight days after his birth. It is observed January 1. New Year's Eve is, of course, celebrated on December 31. So from January 1 to December 31—the entire year—rain soaked Limerick.

The allusion also establishes a theme that religious observance dominated daily life. And it introduces the life of Jesus as an exemplar for a child.

This allusion sets up the contrasts between widespread sickness and homemade remedies; damp, smelly pubs and dry, sweet-smelling churches; the human body and spirituality; physical suffering and religious piety. McCourt's conclusion that Limerick was pious because of the rain is another irony.

3. The description of the rain in Limerick is notable for its **euphony**—its pleasing sound. Identify the literary techniques used in the description.

Prose writers as well as poets polish the sound of their writing. As McCourt uses first-person narration, he subtly enhances its conversational quality with these techniques:

***Assonance:** repetition of vowel sounds as in “out” and “ocean”; “great” and “rain”; “settle” and “forever; “eve” and “wheeze”; “boiled onions.”*

***Consonance:** repetition of the final consonant sounds of words as in “out,” “great” and “drift.”*

***Alliteration:** repetition of the first consonant sound of words as in “cacophony,” “coughs,” “consumptive croaks,” “catarrh,” and “congested.”*

***Sibilance:** the hissing sound of the consonants S, Sh and Z as in “sheets,” “slowly,” “Shannon,” “city,” “sponges,” “slapped,” and “sizzling.”*

4. McCourt characterizes his father's life with a pun about “a price on his head.” What does this pun indicate about McCourt's attitude toward his father?

*A **pun** is a play on words with similar sounds or confused meaning. It reflects McCourt's childhood confusion and ambivalence about his father. It seems dangerous and dramatic that his father was an Irish Republican Army fugitive, subject to a reward for capture. Yet young Frank deflates this impression by seeing Malachy as an ordinary, aging man.*

His grandmother uses an idiom for the mentally impaired—“dropped on his head.” Malachy's rebelliousness and alcoholism are treated in a light, joking way.

5. McCourt imagines several scenes about his mother's family, leading to his own baptism. What literary techniques bring these scenes to life?

*The **exposition** includes the drunken man's song, to depict the Irish setting and create tension between the lyric's humor and the tragic accident that follows.*

*Structurally, the song is a **transition** in the narration from **past tense** to **present tense**, as if McCourt were describing these incidents as they happen. The sentimental song about motherhood is a transition back into exposition in the past tense.*

*McCourt imagines **dialogue** from various characters' perspectives to reveal their conflicts. He uses **dialect** and **colloquialisms** reflecting the setting. He uses **euphemisms** such as “knee-trembler” and “interesting condition” to describe the pregnancy and Catholic morality that pushed his parents into marriage.*

6. What conflicts are apparent in McCourt's family background?

Frank McCourt has an internal conflict between family loyalty and his parents' ill-advised marriage. The Cuchulain legend represents Frank's affection for his father, and highlights the difference between a mythic hero and an alcoholic's delusions.

His Sheehan relatives despise his father's alcoholism, his northern Ireland origin, and his suspected Presbyterianism. His mother, Angela, is overshadowed and overpowered by her relatives and her feckless husband.

Social conditions work against the family, too. Ireland's history of poverty and religious prejudice, immigration, Catholic ideology, and the Great Depression compound their problems.

7. Beginning with the playground accident with brother Malachy in Brooklyn, how does the narrator's perspective change? What narrative technique does McCourt employ in this incident?

*McCourt returns to the perspective of a young child. The childish **persona** observes events with emotional honesty, but does not understand what they mean.*

*This narrative technique of reporting thoughts and impressions as they happen to the character is called **stream of consciousness**.*

8. The author tells what family life is like "when Dad brings home the first week's wages." How many times does the author repeat this phrase, or variations of it? What is the effect of this repetition?

The phrase is repeated three times in successive paragraphs describing the family's happiness when they have money for food and other necessities.

Variations of the phrase serve as transitions when the father gets drunk and the mother is desperate. For example: "When Dad's job goes into the third week"; "On the morning of the fourth Friday of Dad's job"; "The next week Dad loses the job"; and "He takes a few dollars from his wages."

The phrase organizes the action and emphasizes the family conflict and thematic importance of money. Verbal repetition also implies this sequence of events happened repeatedly. The simple diction is in keeping with a child's perspective.

Chapter 2

1. Explain how the author structures his family's first impression of County Antrim near Belfast. What differences are apparent in the Irish people and surroundings?

The description of Ireland unfolds chronologically as the family travels to the McCourt grandparents' home. Dialogue includes observations about the new setting and characters. The scene is paced as a series of unexpected adjustments and disappointments.

Their walk from Belfast reveals the rural countryside and farm animals unknown to the children. Their father is unusually impatient. He is back home, but the children are foreigners.

The children do not recognize the Catholic priest or use of the honorific "Father." It is apparent the American children have had no religious instruction.

The boys think the Irish dialect is funny. Their American accents remind the Irish of movie stars or gangsters—a stereotype.

The McCourt grandparents and aunts are not friendly or encouraging like the old Brooklyn neighbors. They do not welcome Angela or the children. While President Franklin Roosevelt offers hope in America, they warn that the Depression is worse in Ireland. Father Malachy McCourt's ideas about getting farm work and the "dole" (unemployment benefits) are delusions.

The chamber pot and outhouse indicate living conditions are primitive.

2. Contrast father Malachy McCourt's attitude about the Irish Republican Army to the reaction of Charles Heggarty, the IRA officer in Dublin. A flying column is a band of soldiers. The Troubles refer to the Irish civil war from 1919 to 1922.

This episode is an excellent example of situational irony.

Malachy McCourt feels entitled to respect as an ex-IRA gunman. Regardless of his failures, he believes he is a champion of independence. He makes a grandiose promise to his wife to return with money. He brags that he is raising his sons to be soldiers. Yet he insults an officer who could help him.

Charles Heggarty requires proof of IRA enlistment. He dismisses Malachy as a drunken fraud who exploits his child. Young Frank McCourt witnesses this disillusioning scene. The result is that the family has no food or shelter until the police intervene.

3. Compare the allusions to the Cuchulain legend in Chapters 1 and 2. What do they indicate about young Frank McCourt's intellectual development and his relationship with his father?

In Chapter 1, little Frank thinks his father tells Cuchulain stories especially for him. He is jealous of this privilege, and does not understand that the stories are ancient lore. He confuses elements of the legend with real life.

In Chapter 2, young Frank thinks the policeman who fishes at Lough Neagh is Cuchulain. He thinks the hero literally exists. The boy admires the Cuchulain statue at Dublin's General Post Office for its own sake, not as a symbol idealizing the 1916 Easter Rising.

The skeptical taxi driver, who points out the bullet holes ruining the Post Office, is another contrast to father Malachy McCourt's grandiose sense of himself. Mother Angela McCourt stays in the taxi and does not go look at the statue. She is literally unmoved by her husband's sense of national grievance and glory.

4. How would you classify the advice uncle Pa Keating offers to Malachy McCourt?

*Pa Keating's speech about fleas is a satire, inspired by father Malachy McCourt's useless beating of the infested mattress. His advice is **absurd**, such as turning the mattress upside down to confuse the fleas. He **exaggerates** by comparing a flea's strength to a man's jumping up to the moon. He uses **anthropomorphism** when he says fleas are bold enough to discuss history. He blames the English for fleas, whereas the legendary snakes led away by St. Patrick were no trouble—another exaggerated contrast.*

5. What are the poor women's attitudes toward the St. Vincent de Paul Society? What are the charity workers' attitudes toward the women seeking help?

The poor Limerick women are by turns competitive and sympathetic with each other. They share advice about how to get what they need from the St. Vincent de Paul Society. They defend their own dignity by insulting and manipulating Mr. Quinlivan and the storekeepers. Nora Molloy cleverly threatens to go to Protestant charities if the society will not help. She turns Catholic ideology to her material purpose.

Mr. Quinlivan treats the women with contempt. Despite their poverty, he threatens to withhold aid and doom their souls to hell. The women must tell their woes to the judgmental relief committee, which reviews claims to ascertain "real need." The store proprietor is hostile to the women as well.

6. What can you infer from the belief that boiled milk and onion will cure a sick child? What is the narrative purpose of this incident?

This homemade remedy is inadequate to treat serious diseases like pneumonia, tuberculosis, and malnutrition. Angela and Malachy McCourt seem ignorant. They do not deal with illness until symptoms are perilous. They cannot afford food, medicine, or medical care.

The narrative function of this incident is to foreshadow the twins' deaths.

7. What is the attitude of the teachers toward the boys at Leamy's National School?

The teachers are rigid and punitive, even sadistic. Instruction is by rote and colored by teachers' prejudices. School is another challenge to children's survival.

8. The account of Eugene's death begins with "He died anyway." How does that transitional sentence link the preceding paragraph with the incidents that follow?

The understatement of that sentence establishes a mood of helplessness and grief. It is an ironic response to the father's hope that God would help baby Eugene forget his dead twin, Oliver. Of course, older brother Frank McCourt did not forget.

9. What is the author's focus in the wake and funeral scenes? What images made a meaningful impression on young Frank?

The description of baby Eugene's wake and funeral focuses on the adults' weaknesses and the boy's growing understanding of his circumstances. For example, his grandmother makes Frank responsible for controlling his father's alcoholism, even though she encourages drinking to soothe grief. His father exploits the child's death to get free drinks. His mother is incapacitated. The other relatives make self-centered, inappropriate comments. The drunken hearse driver is indifferent.

There are many details to support interpretation. Author Frank McCourt said his most vivid memory was of the brown beer stains on Eugene's white coffin while his father drank in the pub.

Chapter 3

1. Compare the meaning and traditions of Christmas with the McCourts' life in Limerick.

The religious observance celebrates Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem and their refuge in a stable, where Jesus was born. Recall that in Chapter 1, McCourt describes the dry, sweet-smelling churches of Limerick. A church nativity scene is more pleasant than life in the slum.

The McCourts live in a decrepit house, with another baby about to be born. They get grudging help from the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Angela and the boys wander the streets gathering furniture, food, and coal, while the better-off residents mock them. Any kindness is important and appreciated.

The butcher does not understand Angela's retort that Jews like the holy family would not eat a pig's head (Jewish dietary laws forbid eating pork). This is another indicator of cultural and religious narrowmindedness.

Father Malachy McCourt expresses religious platitudes and magical thinking. His notions of male dignity do not include feeding his family. He is not a model of fatherhood like Joseph. When uncle Pa Keating finds the boys scrounging for coal on Christmas Day, his expletive "Jesus, Mary and Holy St. Joseph!" is ironic.

Young Frank's dream about the crying pig at the crèche indicates a profound awareness of death and sacrifice. The pig, Jesus, and the mythic hero Cuchulain are all destined to die, as children and martyrs do.

2. Identify the tone of the explanation for why men sit while women stand in Ireland.

The tone is ironic and sarcastic. McCourt describes how women maintain their homes and raise children regardless of the state of the world. Meanwhile, the jobless men collect unemployment benefits and waste time and money. The men argue over distant news events they cannot influence while their own families suffer.

3. What can be inferred about the meaning of the Friday penny? Why do young Frank and Malachy refuse their father's penny after he gets home from the cement factory?

The Friday penny is an allowance or reward for children. The father is showing off his status as a working man and head of household. He expects his sons to do as he orders and be grateful for the coin.

At this point in the memoir, the boys are old enough to know that other fathers are different, and capable of providing more than pennies for their families. Their father's drunkenness causes repeated disappointment and hardship. The children have lost respect for him. That is situational irony because their father is obsessed with being respected.

4. What is ironic about Angela's desire to return to the United States and build a better life? What is the significance of this goal that she sets for herself and her family?

The McCourts are presently in Ireland because they could not succeed in the United States. They have returned to Ireland for a "better life" where they would be supported by family and friends. The significance is that her belief in a better life in the United States is no less a delusion than the stories Malachy tells and his own inability to see the truth of his life.

Chapter 4

1. How does Chapter 4's organization—the arrangement of the story elements—affect the narrative's meaning?

The episodes in this chapter alternate between religious instruction and the boys' life in the streets. The incongruity swings from pathos to comic relief.

Catechism class focuses on indoctrination, ritual, and fear. Impoverished children are expected to model themselves after martyrs. The boys are confused by the catechism's elevated diction, but they are not allowed to ask questions.

To the children, First Communion represents money and treats. They are eager to learn about the bodily sins that the church condemns. Frank's eagerness to see the James Cagney gangster movie is the antithesis of their lessons.

Yet Christian ethics are evident in Mikey Molloy's sense of responsibility. The way that young Frank gave a raisin to Paddy Clohessy can be debated. Was Frank kind to the poorest boy, or was his favor futile given the severity of Paddy's poverty?

2. Explain the situational irony of Peter Molloy, champion pint drinker.

Peter Molloy wins money from bets on his capacity to drink. He wins by vomiting what he drinks, in order to drink more. He spends all his money this way, leaving his family in desperate poverty. Rather than making his family proud, he destroys his wife's sanity. His disabled son Mikey is the hero of the family.

3. How does Mikey Molloy influence young Frank?

Mikey Molloy is skeptical of religious doctrine and marriage. He vows to do what he likes; he rejects the notion of hell after suffering so much in life. Mikey has book knowledge and vulgar knowledge about girls. He is a clever manipulator, using his seizures to get what he wants. Young Frank admires Mikey's intelligence and independent thinking.

4. Examine the way McCourt presents dialogue in the catechism class. What is the effect of this technique?

In short sentences, McCourt imitates the teacher's questions and the students' recitation of answers. The answers repeat the teacher's opinion verbatim. The dialogue demonstrates the teacher's authority and education by rote without comprehension. The students are not taught to think for themselves.

5. How does the character of father Malachy McCourt develop?

Father Malachy McCourt shows good qualities, such as sensitivity to his worried son. He is a good writer and storyteller. His arrogance shows when he pretends to refuse money for writing letters, yet takes it from his wife when the neighbors leave. He shows no regard for Nora Molloy when he wonders whether she is insane because she bakes, or bakes because she is insane. Nora's insanity is caused by her husband's alcoholism. The Molloy family is a parallel to the McCourts.

6. What possible meanings does the recurring **motif** of bread reveal or reflect in this chapter?

Bread means bodily and spiritual nourishment, as well as sacrifice.

In Communion, bread represents the body of Jesus and his willing sacrifice to redeem mankind.

For Nora and Mikey Molloy, baking bread represents mother love and responsibility.

The fact that the alcoholic Peter Molloy and Malachy McCourt do not understand why Nora Molloy bakes bread signifies their neglect of their family responsibilities.

The Irish government provides buns to feed the poor schoolchildren, but the buns lack raisins as promised. The school lunch seems miserly; the boys beg for one raisin. Frank sacrifices his raisin to the poorest boy.

Chapter 5

1. What does the poem "The Man from the North" imply? Why does Angela laugh when she recites it?

The poem is about a kind, trustworthy man from Northern Ireland and his harmonious marriage to a woman from Limerick in Southern Ireland. The poem's premise is the polar opposite of Angela's marriage and the attitude of Limerick townspeople. Angela repeats the third verse with the words "hate or scorn" to emphasize her feelings toward her husband. Her laughter mocks her marriage.

2. Why does Angela insist that Frank take Irish dancing lessons despite the expense?

Angela says dance lessons will keep her son from wandering the streets with bad boys. The cultural tradition also seems important to her.

3. For what intended effect does McCourt describe his attempt at Irish dancing in long, run-on sentences?

The long, run-on sentences mimic the argument between mother and son over learning to dance. Then when Frank is in Mrs. O'Connor's class, the long sentences suggest his confusion and the fast pace of the dance.

4. The Arch Confraternity is cited as evidence that Limerick is the holiest city in Ireland. Do the boys' reasons for joining the organization support this claim to fame?

According to McCourt, the priest pressures poor men and boys to join the Arch Confraternity to maintain Catholic orthodoxy. The boys hope they will be recommended for jobs when they grow up. Meanwhile, they avoid having their families humiliated by the censorious priest. In McCourt's view, the confraternity members are bullied or opportunistic rather than devout.

5. What does Frank's preparation to be an altar boy indicate about his father? What does this episode reveal about his mother?

Frank's father must have been educated to learn Latin. He makes a pretentious show of teaching Frank, by having the boy kneel on the floor while learning the liturgy. He ignores Angela's concerns about proper clothing. Once again, Malachy McCourt raises his family's expectations, only to be disappointed when the church custodian rejects Frank.

Angela is realistic about the stigma of poverty and snobbery in the church. She suggests Frank's father appeal to a priest on the boy's behalf, but that does not happen.

Chapter 6

1. Frank McCourt organizes this chapter around several self-contradictory characters. Summarize the contrasting traits and experiences that these characters represent.

Mr. O'Neill, the fourth-grade teacher, is enthusiastic about geometry. He calls Euclid "divine in application"—comparing education to godliness. He welcomes questions, praises the intelligent boys, and is a challenging teacher. Yet he taunts hungry students with his apple peel and calls the slower students "idiots" when they make mistakes.

Fintan Slattery, the religious boy, is smug, mean-spirited, and homosexual. He counts on indulgence—the concept of God's mercy to forgive sins—as an excuse for his bad behavior and condescension to other boys. Catholicism regards homosexual acts as sinful, which makes Fintan's ambition to be a saint even more unlikely.

Paddy Clohessy lives in abject poverty, in conditions even worse than Frank's. Yet Paddy is a resilient boy. The starvation in the city is contrasted to the plentiful produce on surrounding farms. In the country, Paddy shows he is resourceful.

Dennis Clohessy, Paddy's father, is dying of tuberculosis. Yet he once was an excellent dancer, and was Angela McCourt's ballroom partner. The "Kerry Dance" song emphasizes their dire circumstances.

Frank McCourt's two personas as author and character are evident, too. In Chapters 2 and 3, the author described the stigma of poverty. Yet young Frank himself was disgusted by the Clohessys.

2. Contrast Paddy Clohessy's ambition to join the English army to young Frank's impression of being a soldier.

Frank McCourt's father makes his young sons vow to die for Ireland as martyrs for independence. They are taught to despise England.

Paddy Clohessy's ambition to join the English military gives Frank McCourt a view of the world beyond Ireland. Paddy does not do well in school, but he has abilities.

Paddy thinks military service in India would be comfortable, with exotic food, silk tents, and compliant girls. Paddy knows the English upper classes will snub him, but he will be respected by Indians loyal to the king. (Colonial snobbery will work to Paddy's advantage.) Paddy aspires to run away and enlist when he turns fourteen to help support his family. The English army is Paddy's best hope for a better life.

3. What does Frank learn about his mother at the Clohessy home?

Frank learns that his mother was an excellent dancer. This explains why she insisted on dancing lessons. Though she warned Frank not to go to these tenements, she is gracious with the sick man and intervenes with the teacher on Paddy's behalf.

Chapter 7

1. Compare the description of father Malachy McCourt's job loss, when Frank is nine years old, with the same situation described in Chapter 1, when Frank was three.

In Chapter 7, the description of drunkenness and job loss is concise. It begins with the end result: money wasted on drink. Sentences use the present and future verb tenses to indicate these actions are familiar and anticipated. The narration is told from Frank's point of view, and reflects resentment and self-interest. The brothers now sing their father's rebel songs to get money for candy. Frank realizes it is foolish to expect a child to die for Irish politics. The boys share their mother's bitterness. His father's failure is categorized as "the bad thing."

In Chapter 1, when Frank was three, the description of waiting for father's wages is chronological, beginning with innocent optimism and excitement. The present-tense narration observes the adults as the father's failure unfolds. The children are compliant. Finally, the child Frank concludes he will get a job to make his mother happy.

2. Characterize the narrator's attitude toward death in the episode about Mickey Spellacy. Compare this episode with Eugene's death in Chapter 2.

Young Frank envies Mickey Spellacy because he gets excused from school when there is a death in his family. The boys pray for Mickey's sister in anticipation of eating well at her wake. This is childish self-interest. Death is commonplace.

In Chapter 2, Eugene's death had pathos. Frank was taught that dead children went to heaven and were better off. By age nine, he is accustomed to wakes as parties.

3. Frank's grandmother expects him to help his uncle Pat deliver newspapers because of Pat's bad leg. What is Pat's attitude toward Frank in return for his help?

Uncle Pat, known as the Abbott, is regarded as a pathetic, simple-minded cripple. He is a popular figure in Limerick's streets. Pat manipulates others' pity to get what he wants. He treats young Frank in an unsympathetic, calculating way that reveals business intelligence and survival instincts.

4. Mr. Timoney assures young Frank that he will understand Jonathan Swift's essay "A Modest Proposal" when he grows up. Explain the difference between Mr. Timoney's enjoyment of the essay and young Frank's understanding of it.

Young Frank reads "A Modest Proposal" literally, as being about cooking and eating Irish babies.

Mr. Timoney knows the essay is satire condemning England's indifference to the horrors of Irish poverty. Jonathan Swift's sarcastic argument proposes to treat Irish mothers as breeding animals, to produce infants like farm commodities. Swift uses mock logic and irony to attack greedy absentee landlords and religious hypocrisy. The essay summarizes eighteenth-century social conditions that are alarmingly similar to the McCourts' life.

5. How has Frank's relationship with his parents changed?

Frank's curiosity and self-awareness clash with his parents' expectations of unquestioning obedience. He is kept ignorant and confused. For example, his mother's pregnancy is kept secret. Frank still believes angels deliver babies on the stairway. Yet Frank is responsible for searching for and locating his drunken father. His affection is tainted by resentment.

6. Why does the priest ask Frank to pray for him after Frank has confessed to stealing food?

The priest is humbled by the struggles of the poor—like Frank's family—and his inability to help them. Rather than regarding suffering in the abstract, the priest acknowledges the immediate reality.

Chapter 8

1. Compare the boys' Confirmation instruction to their First Communion in Chapter 4.

Once again the boys are taught to recite Catholic dogma and be prepared to die for the faith. Talk of "dirty things" has become full-blown sexual curiosity. The Collection money now counts toward a future job for Quasimodo Dooley. The boys' families get them through the ritual, but they do not help with the bigger issues of maturity.

2. What is Frank's attitude toward death when he is sick with typhoid? What narrative function does this incident provide?

Frank is so ill he does not care if he dies. The Catholic last rites are meaningless to him. He knows he will survive when the doctor farts in his presence. The incongruence between the physical and spiritual realms provides comic relief.

3. What is the tone of Patricia Madigan's death? Why would the author handle a death scene this way?

Patricia Madigan's death is treated with understatement. Hers is one more death in the hospital where victims of the Great Famine died.

Understatement is typical of author Frank McCourt's style. In this episode, understatement also reflects the fact that he was separated from Patricia and learned of her death secondhand.

4. The word “soldier” has several connotations in this chapter. Briefly summarize the various meanings of “soldier.”

At Confirmation, the boys are called soldiers of the Church, meaning Catholic martyrs who die for their beliefs.

When Frank has typhoid, he receives a blood transfusion, donated by a soldier. Consequently, his father calls his son a “great old soldier” for surviving a deadly illness. That is the opposite of his father’s usual vow to die as a soldier fighting for Ireland—that a good soldier lives.

The nuns and doctor also call Frank “our little soldier,” with a hint of condescension.

Patricia Madigan interprets soldier’s blood to mean a literal transformation causing Frank to march and salute.

In the poem “The Highwayman,” soldiers shoot the romantic bandit in love with the landlord’s daughter. The melancholy mood fits the untimely death of Patricia Madigan in the hospital.

Mr. O’Halloran teaches his students that Irish soldiers committed atrocities. He tells them the truth about history rather than noble myth.

5. How does Frank turn his school assignment about Jesus in Limerick into an effective essay? Why do his teachers question whether he wrote it himself?

*Frank writes a **logical argument** about how Jesus would experience the Limerick slums, in contrast to life in the biblical Holy Land. Frank argues that Jesus would die of tuberculosis, thus negating the future Catholic Church. He cleverly refutes his teacher’s premise that Jesus would not be crucified in Limerick because of the people’s devotion by noting that Jesus was a Jew. This challenges Catholic doctrine that Jesus was the first pastor and Church bishops have succeeded in an unbroken line from him. Frank writes realistically about the life of the poor rather than expressing platitudes. The essay has specific observations, biblical allusions, and insightful conclusions. Though his teachers are suspicious, Frank’s intelligence and writing ability are apparent.*

6. What goal does Frank’s father set for him?

Frank’s father tells him to return to the United States to get a good job and live decently.

7. Characterize Sister Rita’s attitude when Frank returns to the hospital for Christmas dinner.

Sister Rita treats Frank with condescension rather than genuine hospitality.

Chapter 9

1. Identify the tone of the characterization of the “new rich” of Limerick. Cite words and phrases that reveal the author’s attitude toward these people.

The author mocks the newly prosperous by exaggerating their social pretensions. They “show the world” a neater appearance, join “a better class of people” at a more expensive movie theater, and adopt snobbish manners “if you do not mind.” They “think nothing of” new luxuries such as tea cups, and complain “service is not what it used to be” on the bus.

2. Frank’s mother tells him not to cry after seeing Mr. Timoney again because the elderly man is not his father. What does Mr. Timoney represent to Frank?

Mr. Timoney is the first adult to treat Frank like an intelligent individual. Mr. Timoney’s unorthodox background as a Buddhist and army veteran of India enlarges Frank’s world view. He introduces Frank to an intellectual giant, Jonathan Swift.

3. How does the author foreshadow the conclusion of this chapter—that Angela McCourt must apply for public assistance?

As the chapter begins, Frank’s parents are estranged because Angela refuses to risk another pregnancy. Work in England is a way that men escape, if they do not intend to provide for a family. Malachy McCourt’s unwillingness to go provokes more recriminations. The men’s drunkenness before departure recalls his previous bad behavior. The employment agents get the departing men out of the pubs by reminding them there’s Guinness beer and Jameson’s whiskey in England.

The sentence “surely our troubles will be over” has an ominous tone, recalling past disappointments.

Angela scorns Mrs. Meagher’s plight when money does not come. But this foreshadows the worst outcome. The telegram boy who was abandoned by his drunken father confirms the McCourts got nothing.

Frank’s eye disease introduces readers to the Dispensary, the last resort of the poor and sick. Mr. Downes’ account of Malachy McCourt’s drunkenness in England ends all hope. Angela must seek public assistance.

4. What statement is the author making by describing Mr. Kane’s behavior?

Kane’s humiliating Angela and blaming her for her husband’s abandonment further illustrates the lack of compassion and justice in the predominantly Catholic, Irish society.

Chapter 10

1. Examine how the author renders an impression of Limerick kitchens on the way to Kathleen O'Connell's shop. How does the sentence structure reflect the action?

One long sentence describes light, warmth, plentiful food, and happy families, in contrast to the McCourts' deprivation. Punctuation is intentionally missing, to speed the reader past the details. The nonstop pace imitates Frank running through the cold streets to the grocery shop.

2. What is the effect of the one-word sentence "Lemonade"?

The short sentence imitates an abrupt stop when Frank sees what his sick mother wants.

3. At age eleven, Frank does not know what to do in his aunt's house. Based on the narrative to this point, what can you infer about the causes of Frank's uncertainty?

Frank's parents, church, and school all demand unquestioning obedience. Curiosity and intelligence are punished. Social and religious taboos keep him ignorant. Because he is poor, he is universally treated with pity or contempt. Poverty limits his range of social experience.

4. Frank's perspective on his family changes between the meal at the beginning of the chapter and the meal at the end. Summarize how Frank's attitude shifts up to the chapter's conclusion.

When Angela becomes ill, Frank takes charge knowing there is no other help. His grandmother and aunt despise the children. He and his brothers steal despite their religious upbringing. They rationalize stealing as a guilty necessity, boyish adventure, and retaliation against better-off people. Frank becomes distrustful of adults and is sensitive to grudging favors. After his father abandons the family, Frank is responsible for his brothers.

However, seeing his mother beg at the priests' house shocks and disgusts him. Frank is ashamed of his mother. Frank sees his mother the way his relatives and outsiders do. Her shame stigmatizes him, too.

Chapter 11

1. Frank's mother says the family's trunk contains nothing of interest, and "what you do not know will not bother you." Compare and contrast Angela's and Frank's interest in the trunk's contents.

Frank has outgrown such warnings to keep his hands off the trunk. The family trunk actually contains important documents. Frank's American birth certificate and passport allow him to return to the United States when he is older. It is a harbinger of his future escape from Irish poverty.

The trunk also hides Angela's past: her youthful happiness as a dancer and her forced marriage due to pregnancy. Of course, Frank was the resulting child. Frank first heard about his mother's dancing days from Dennis Clohessy, and saw her cry over the memories. However, his mother shielded him from the shame of illegitimacy. Frank grew up innocent and loved enough to think his birth was a miracle four months after his parents' wedding.

Mikey Molloy disabuses Frank of his innocence by telling him the facts of pregnancy, and the religious consequences of being a bastard. While Frank shrugs off impending doom in the religious sense—especially after his soccer team is blessed with victory—he broods over his mother's sexual behavior. He vows to use it against her if she ever reprimands him.

Just as the red dress symbolizes Angela's happiness, the red hearts Frank cuts out of it represent the glorious day his soccer team beat the rich Crescent College boys. The fabric is an emblem of physical pleasure.

2. What is a likely reason for Peter Molloy, champion pint drinker's, decision to become the champion of no pints at all?

When Peter Molloy takes his son Mikey out for his first beer on his sixteenth birthday, Peter knows women oppose drinking, including his angry wife, Nora. Mikey, who is an intelligent boy, does not like beer. Peter remarks that drinking too much—getting drunk—could turn Mikey against drinking altogether. So he acknowledges moderation is better. And he realizes the family could have a better life in England. The wartime industries there make prosperity possible.

3. Contrast Frank's view of being a working man to Mr. Hannon's experience.

Working is a matter of pride for Frank, in contrast to his irresponsible father. Hauling coal seems like an adventure better than school. He is given about twenty cents a week to help deliver nearly a ton of coal. The money helps his mother and pays for treats. Frank ignores his eye disease, aggravated by the coal dust. If he kept the job into adulthood, he would have to carry sacks as Mr. Hannon does.

Mr. Hannon is a good-hearted, responsible man. Yet he barely earns enough to support his family, despite long hours. He is exhausted, and his health is ruined by hard labor. Delivering coal is a menial job requiring no skill. He is middle-aged and has no security. He knows education is the best avenue out of Limerick, and urges Frank to stay in school.

Chapter 12

1. Compare and contrast Malachy McCourt's homecoming from England to the Christmas described in Chapter 3. What's different about Angela's and the boys' attitudes in Chapter 12?

Malachy McCourt's letter promises "everything will be different." In fact, their Christmas is the same or worse. Once again, the family relies on food provided through the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Once again, their father does not arrive when expected, and disappoints them by being broke. What is worse is that everyone knows he is lying about "hard times" in England. The boys shout at him for wasting his money on drink. In the past, the boys sang his songs or listened to stories, but not now. Frank knows his father does not care about them.

2. Explain the irony of Malachy McCourt's allusion to the Holy Family traveling on Christmas Day. What is the tone of his exit out the door?

Malachy McCourt compares hitchhiking to the Holy Family's journey to Bethlehem. The allusion is ironic because he is abandoning his family. In Chapter 3, he talked about a man's dignity. Here, he expects to be pitied. Unlike other workers in England who sent home remittances, he cannot even afford traveling fares.

His departure is described with understatement. He never reunited with the family.

3. Frank wishes that he had a father like the railroad man. What other examples of fathers has Frank had?

Uncle Pa Keating is witty, hard-working, and enjoys children. Mr. Downes and Mr. Hannon are responsible workers who take care of their families. Mr. Timoney encourages Frank's intelligence and challenges Ireland's status quo. Seamus, the hospital janitor, is kind and perceptive, and he wants children. Peter Molloy decides to quit drinking for the sake of his family.

4. What can you infer about Laman Griffin's behavior compared with his education and Royal Navy service?

Laman Griffin is a crude drunk who treats Angela and Frank contemptibly. He is no gentleman, yet his library books imply interests and experiences he gave up. He is an example of the lack of opportunity in Ireland, and its complicated politics. Rockwell College is a Catholic boarding school, so his mother had ambitions for him. He served in the English Navy, but did not advance. He ended up working as a laborer digging post holes for the electric utility company.

Chapter 13

1. Explain why librarian Catherine O'Riordan's note praising Frank's interest in *Lives of the Saints* is situational irony.

The librarian thinks Frank has the makings of a celibate priest because he is absorbed by the book describing Catholic martyrs. Actually, Frank is captivated by the horror and sexual abuse. He is intensely curious about women.

2. What is Mr. O'Halloran's advice to his students?

The headmaster tells boys to learn and think for themselves.

3. Compare Brother Murray's refusal to admit Frank to the Christian Brothers School with the description of the students in Chapter 12.

The description in Chapter 12 foreshadows Brother Murray's rejection of Frank despite his teacher's recommendation. The middle-class boys are preparing for civil service and management jobs. Frank is stigmatized by poverty in a rigid class system, regardless of his intelligence. Mr. O'Halloran is stymied by the system, too, because his bright students cannot advance.

4. Explain why Angela's response to Frank's rejection is different from his own.

Angela McCourt knows that education offers opportunities for better jobs in the future. Young Frank only knows he is finally free from harsh teachers. He does not yet appreciate that he could be trapped in poverty and hard labor for the rest of his life.

5. Why is it ironic that priests recruit boys at Leamy's School to be missionaries?

Frank was not accepted into the Catholic secondary school, yet he is apparently good enough to risk his life at age thirteen as a missionary in Africa.

6. Compare the reason Angela McCourt weeps to the Redemptorist priest's sermon about the weeping Virgin Mary.

Angela McCourt weeps because her son is denied education and opportunities to improve himself. The priest frightens and humiliates boys by comparing puberty to Jesus's torment and Mary's grief at the Crucifixion. The boys are expected to deny their physical and intellectual natures for the sake of religious conformity. Their real mothers have no power to help them in the social hierarchy.

Chapter 14

1. Now that Frank is living away from his mother, he refers to his father. In what ways does Frank's behavior resemble his father?

With no job, no money, and no welcome at his uncle Pat's house, Frank passes time as his father did. He takes long walks, does odd jobs, accepts scraps of food, and reads newspapers. He recalls his father's gift for storytelling and Irish history at the Norman castle. He becomes aware of his appearance when applying for a job.

2. How does Frank resolve the sin of physical temptation?

Frank is excited and ashamed by sexual desire. He rationalizes sin because all his physical needs and pleasure seem to doom him, anyway. He seeks a sympathetic listener. He has no sex education; the subject is a social taboo.

3. What traits do the saints have in common? What impression does Frank have of their lives?

The saints endure extreme self-denial and physical torture to prove their religious faith. Women happily sacrifice their physical bodies, yet refuse marriage and, by implication, sex.

4. Frank wears his grandmother's dress so he can wash his own clothes. What is the tone of this incident? How does the author pace this scene?

*The tone varies in this scene from pity to absurdity. The scene is told in sequence from the point of view of fourteen-year-old Frank, beginning with his pathetic appearance and ragged clothes. His preoccupation with his thin shoulders is **hyperbole**. Nonetheless, his vitality lets him enjoy looking at girls in the newspaper, find his stingy uncle's food, and stay warm.*

The surprise arrival of his relatives and the incongruity of wearing Grandma's dress create comedy. The "worst thing in the world" is an exaggeration. The scene ends with laughter and reconciliation.

The emotional swings between pathos and hilarity, and understatement and exaggeration, establish the author's style.

Chapter 15

1. Frank is surprised by his aunt's generosity on the morning he applies to be a telegram boy. What causes Aunt Aggie to buy Frank new clothes? Have there been any indications that she might do him such a favor?

The end of Chapter 14 foreshadows her change of heart. Frank was ridiculed for wearing his grandmother's dress while his laundry dried. Aunt Aggie commented on Frank's intention to get a job and support his family. She said Frank was better than his father.

2. Contrast Frank's anticipation of his first job at the telegram office to the way he is treated upon arrival.

Frank anticipates being treated respectfully, like a man. Instead, the office managers mock his shabby appearance and overeagerness. The other boys laugh at him.

3. When Frank receives his first wages, how does his attitude about money change?

Frank goes downtown to show off like the "better class" of people he himself mocked in Chapter 9. Then he realizes that he must save money to return to the United States. Supporting his brothers and mother makes saving even harder. His mother reminds him how little he earns for working so hard.

4. The author reports that the best tips come from the poor. What can you infer is the reason?

Businesses and upper-class people probably receive routine telegrams. The poor await money orders. And they know the value of a tip to a poor boy.

5. Carefully read the paragraph about Toby Mackey, the boy who aspires to be a newspaper reporter. What literary techniques create euphony?

This is another example of run-on sentences, which mimic the pace of conversation.

Alliteration: Toby, temporary, telegram, film, front, facts, Frankie, poetry, pubs.

Assonance: Toby, temporary, film, America, keeps, because, bloody, pubs, sufferings.

Consonance: hundred, thousand, around, world.

Sibilance: saw, some, is not, scrap, arses.

6. Compared with the saints in Chapter 14, what kinds of people does Frank encounter while delivering telegrams?

Frank encounters pathetically sick men, women, and children. They are grateful for simple favors, yet social institutions ignore them. Mrs. Spillane scorns politicians and priests who expect suffering people to mimic religious ideals. Frank's kindness must be kept secret from his boss.

Theresa Carmody is not like the virgins who disdain men. She and Frank both crave love and sex. Her death causes guilt and torment, not rejoicing. Frank avoids churches as a result.

Chapter 16

1. What is Mr. Harrington's opinion of the Irish?

Mr. Harrington, the widower, treats Frank like an exemplar of Irish stereotypes. Mr. Harrington, who is English, insults Ireland because of tuberculosis, alcoholism, and Catholicism. Frank seems to confirm his low opinion by getting drunk and trying to baptize the Protestant woman's corpse.

2. Explain Frank's conflict in working for Mrs. Finucane. How does he justify his actions?

Frank's threatening letters are lies to frighten poor people into paying debts. There is no lawyer involved in debt collection. Frank steals paper and envelopes, then steals money from Mrs. Finucane herself. Frank hardens himself against poor friends and neighbors. He scoffs at paying priests to say Masses for the dead. He resents how he was treated by the Church. He becomes ruthless about money, like Mrs. Finucane and Uncle Pat, the newspaper vendor.

He rationalizes his unethical deeds as a way to pay for immigration to the United States. His promise to send back money to his family assuages his guilt. He is desperate for any opportunity to escape poverty.

3. Why does Frank want to drink a pint of beer on his sixteenth birthday?

The first pint is a ritual of manhood, regardless of alcoholism.

4. Why does Frank choose to work at Easons Ltd., rather than take the post office exam? How is this incident significant to his growth and development?

Easons Ltd., advertised for a "smart boy," which suggests opportunities unlike the predictable post office. Frank reaches beyond his mother's hopes. He is acting independently, as his teacher and uncle advised.

5. What does the Easons manager first notice about Frank's job application?

The manager notices that Frank lives in a slum lane. But he hires Frank on the basis of skill and a compliant demeanor.

6. Compare Frank's resignation from the telegram service to his first day in the office, described in Chapter 15.

Once again, the office managers insult Frank and disparage his ambition.

Chapter 17

1. Describe Frank's mood on his sixteenth birthday. Does the day go as expected?

Frank is ashamed of himself, guilt-ridden over his love affair with Theresa Carmody, and overwhelmed by the war news. Rather than being treated like a man, he is humiliated at work and kicked by a priest for being drunk. Ironically, though his father is absent, Frank comes home drunk the way his father did. He slaps his mother, treating her with contempt as Laman Griffin did.

2. Why is Frank able to confess to Father Gregory? How is Father Gregory different from other priests?

Father Gregory's kindness, encouragement, and promise of forgiveness enable Frank to unburden himself. Frank becomes a child again, and the priest acts like a father. He tells Frank to love himself as a creature of God. The priest dignifies Theresa Carmody's death.

3. Gerry Halvey's girlfriend Rose wants to get married at age seventeen. Does that seem advisable? Compare their relationship to other marriages described in this book.

Gerry Halvey is a bad candidate for marriage at age nineteen. He exaggerates his low-level job status. He stereotypes women, and suspects Rose of promiscuity. He will not talk to her, abandons her in the railroad station, and becomes jealous when Frank does the courtesy of escorting Rose home.

Rose is an innocent romantic who has not seen Gerry in a year, and does not really know him. Their low wages would not support a family. The Irish ban on birth control means pregnancy would be inevitable.

Most of the marriages depicted in the book are miserable. In Chapter 2, Nora Molloy tells Angela McCourt she regrets marrying at age seventeen and getting pregnant right away. In Chapter 16, Uncle Pa Keating warned Frank about getting stuck in a conventional job and marriage. The Hannons are a devoted yet poor family.

4. What does Frank learn about the "filth" in magazines and newspapers?

Men and women of all types are curious about sex and birth control, and scorn government censorship. The newspapers and magazines indicate social class distinctions. Otherwise, the publications seem innocuous.

Chapter 18

1. How does Frank resolve his conflict working for Mrs. Finucane?

After Mrs. Finucane dies, Frank rationalizes stealing her money for Masses by saying his prayers are as good as a priest's. He eliminates his poor neighbors' debts by destroying the ledger. He does not feel guilty for pursuing his goal at others' expense. He reconciles his departure for the United States with his family's intention to immigrate, too.

2. After his first night back in the United States, what differences are evident? Why does Frank agree this is a great country?

Americans are friendly and outspoken. Frank is not judged by his social class. The women at the party are independent of their husbands. They are shameless about pleasure, including sex. There is plenty to eat and drink. The priest has no authority. The United States seems altogether different from Ireland.

Angela's Ashes

Chapter 1

1. Frank McCourt begins his memoir by wondering how he survived his childhood after his family returned to Ireland. What tone does McCourt use as he characterizes the conditions of his youth when he writes, "It was, of course, a miserable childhood: the happy childhood is hardly worth your while"?

2. What is the Feast of the Circumcision? How does this allusion contribute to the description of Limerick's weather?

3. The description of the rain in Limerick is notable for its **euphony**—its pleasing sound. Identify the literary techniques used in the description.

4. McCourt characterizes his father's life with a pun about "a price on his head." What does this pun indicate about McCourt's attitude toward his father?

5. McCourt imagines several scenes about his mother's family, leading to his own baptism. What literary techniques bring these scenes to life?

6. What conflicts are apparent in McCourt's family background?

7. Beginning with the playground accident with brother Malachy in Brooklyn, how does the narrator's perspective change? What narrative technique does McCourt employ in this incident?

8. The author tells what family life is like "when Dad brings home the first week's wages." How many times does the author repeat this phrase, or variations of it? What is the effect of this repetition?

Chapter 2

1. Explain how the author structures his family's first impression of County Antrim near Belfast. What differences are apparent in the Irish people and surroundings?

2. Contrast father Malachy McCourt's attitude about the Irish Republican Army to the reaction of Charles Heggarty, the IRA officer in Dublin. A flying column is a band of soldiers. The Troubles refer to the Irish civil war from 1919 to 1922.

3. Compare the allusions to the Cuchulain legend in Chapters 1 and 2. What do they indicate about young Frank McCourt's intellectual development and his relationship with his father?

4. How would you classify the advice uncle Pa Keating offers to Malachy McCourt?

5. What are the poor women's attitudes toward the St. Vincent de Paul Society? What are the charity workers' attitudes toward the women seeking help?

6. What can you infer from the belief that boiled milk and onion will cure a sick child? What is the narrative purpose of this incident?

7. What is the attitude of the teachers toward the boys at Leamy's National School?

8. The account of Eugene's death begins with "He died anyway." How does that transitional sentence link the preceding paragraph with the incidents that follow?

9. What is the author's focus in the wake and funeral scenes? What images made a meaningful impression on young Frank?

Chapter 3

1. Compare the meaning and traditions of Christmas with the McCourts' life in Limerick.

2. Identify the tone of the explanation for why men sit while women stand in Ireland.

3. What can be inferred about the meaning of the Friday penny? Why do young Frank and Malachy refuse their father's penny after he gets home from the cement factory?

4. What is ironic about Angela's desire to return to the United States and build a better life? What is the significance of this goal that she sets for herself and her family?

Chapter 4

1. How does Chapter 4's organization—the arrangement of the story elements—affect the narrative's meaning?

2. Explain the situational irony of Peter Molloy, champion pint drinker.

3. How does Mikey Molloy influence young Frank?

4. Examine the way McCourt presents dialogue in the catechism class. What is the effect of this technique?

5. How does the character of father Malachy McCourt develop?

6. What possible meanings does the recurring **motif** of bread reveal or reflect in this chapter?

Chapter 5

1. What does the poem "The Man from the North" imply? Why does Angela laugh when she recites it?

2. Why does Angela insist that Frank take Irish dancing lessons despite the expense?

3. For what intended effect does McCourt describe his attempt at Irish dancing in long, run-on sentences?

4. The Arch Confraternity is cited as evidence that Limerick is the holiest city in Ireland. Do the boys' reasons for joining the organization support this claim to fame?

5. What does Frank's preparation to be an altar boy indicate about his father? What does this episode reveal about his mother?

Chapter 6

1. Frank McCourt organizes this chapter around several self-contradictory characters. Summarize the contrasting traits and experiences that these characters represent.

2. Contrast Paddy Clohessy's ambition to join the English army to young Frank's impression of being a soldier.

3. What does Frank learn about his mother at the Clohessy home?

Chapter 7

1. Compare the description of father Malachy McCourt's job loss, when Frank is nine years old, with the same situation described in Chapter 1, when Frank was three.

2. Characterize the narrator's attitude toward death in the episode about Mickey Spellacy. Compare this episode with Eugene's death in Chapter 2.

3. Frank's grandmother expects him to help his uncle Pat deliver newspapers because of Pat's bad leg. What is Pat's attitude toward Frank in return for his help?

4. Mr. Timoney assures young Frank that he will understand Jonathan Swift's essay "A Modest Proposal" when he grows up. Explain the difference between Mr. Timoney's enjoyment of the essay and young Frank's understanding of it.

5. How has Frank's relationship with his parents changed?

6. Why does the priest ask Frank to pray for him after Frank has confessed to stealing food?

Chapter 8

1. Compare the boys' Confirmation instruction to their First Communion in Chapter 4.

2. What is Frank's attitude toward death when he is sick with typhoid? What narrative function does this incident provide?

3. What is the tone of Patricia Madigan's death? Why would the author handle a death scene this way?

4. The word “soldier” has several connotations in this chapter. Briefly summarize the various meanings of “soldier.”

5. How does Frank turn his school assignment about Jesus in Limerick into an effective essay? Why do his teachers question whether he wrote it himself?

6. What goal does Frank’s father set for him?

7. Characterize Sister Rita’s attitude when Frank returns to the hospital for Christmas dinner.

Chapter 9

1. Identify the tone of the characterization of the “new rich” of Limerick. Cite words and phrases that reveal the author’s attitude toward these people.

2. Frank’s mother tells him not to cry after seeing Mr. Timoney again because the elderly man is not his father. What does Mr. Timoney represent to Frank?

3. How does the author foreshadow the conclusion of this chapter—that Angela McCourt must apply for public assistance?

4. What statement is the author making by describing Mr. Kane’s behavior?

Chapter 10

1. Examine how the author renders an impression of Limerick kitchens on the way to Kathleen O'Connell's shop. How does the sentence structure reflect the action?

2. What is the effect of the one-word sentence "Lemonade"?

3. At age eleven, Frank does not know what to do in his aunt's house. Based on the narrative to this point, what can you infer about the causes of Frank's uncertainty?

4. Frank's perspective on his family changes between the meal at the beginning of the chapter and the meal at the end. Summarize how Frank's attitude shifts up to the chapter's conclusion.

Chapter 11

1. Frank's mother says the family's trunk contains nothing of interest, and "what you do not know will not bother you." Compare and contrast Angela's and Frank's interest in the trunk's contents.

2. What is a likely reason for Peter Molloy, champion pint drinker's, decision to become the champion of no pints at all?

3. Contrast Frank's view of being a working man to Mr. Hannon's experience.

Chapter 12

1. Compare and contrast Malachy McCourt's homecoming from England to the Christmas described in Chapter 3. What's different about Angela's and the boys' attitudes in Chapter 12?

2. Explain the irony of Malachy McCourt's allusion to the Holy Family traveling on Christmas Day. What is the tone of his exit out the door?

3. Frank wishes that he had a father like the railroad man. What other examples of fathers has Frank had?

4. What can you infer about Laman Griffin's behavior compared with his education and Royal Navy service?

Chapter 13

1. Explain why librarian Catherine O'Riordan's note praising Frank's interest in *Lives of the Saints* is situational irony.

2. What is Mr. O'Halloran's advice to his students?

3. Compare Brother Murray's refusal to admit Frank to the Christian Brothers School with the description of the students in Chapter 12.

4. Explain why Angela's response to Frank's rejection is different from his own.

5. Why is it ironic that priests recruit boys at Leamy's School to be missionaries?

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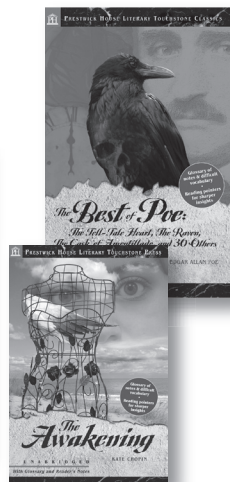
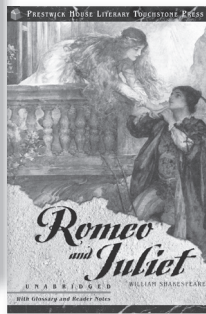
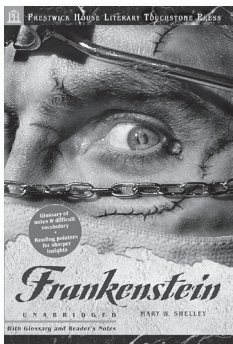
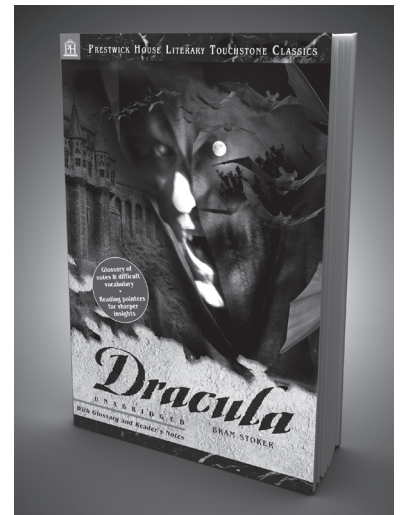
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