

TYPHOID FEVER

Based on an excerpt from *Angela's Ashes* by Frank McCourt

One morning a girl's voice from the next room says, "Boy with the typhoid, are you awake?"

"I am."

"What's your name?"

"Frank."

"My name is Patricia Madigan. How old are you?"

10

"Ten."

"Oh." She sounds disappointed.

"But I'll be eleven next month."

"Well, that's better than ten. I'll be fourteen in September." **A**

She tells me she is in the Fever Hospital with diphtheria and "something else," nobody knows what.

20

Soon Sister Rita is lecturing about no talking between rooms and telling us we should be saying the rosary¹ and giving thanks for our recoveries.

She leaves and Patricia whispers, "Give thanks, Francis, and say your rosary." I laugh so hard the stern nurse from County Kerry² runs in to see if I'm all right. She scolds me for laughing and says, "No laughing because you'll damage your internal apparatus!" **B**

1. The **rosary** is a group of prayers that Roman Catholics say while holding a string of beads.
2. **County Kerry:** The nurse's accent is different from that of the children.

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Courtesy of David Prifti

A HERE'S HOW

Literary Focus

The author keeps his **sentences** short and crisp while Frank and Patricia are meeting each other. I will keep reading to see if he changes his sentence structure as the story goes on.

B HERE'S HOW

Reading Focus

The nun from County Kerry seems very strict. I think the author may be using his **word choice** to really show how he felt about nuns as a young boy.

A YOUR TURN

Literary Focus

How would you describe the author's **tone** in this paragraph?

B YOUR TURN

Reading Focus

By examining the author's **word choice**, how do you think he feels about Sister Rita?

C HERE'S HOW

Vocabulary

I looked up the word *pagan* in the dictionary and it means "having little or no religion."

D HERE'S HOW

Language Coach

I know that every word has a **denotation** (dictionary definition) and a **connotation** (feeling or association attached to it). I think Sister Rita uses the word *pagan* with a negative connotation.

After she plods out, Patricia whispers again in a heavy Kerry accent, "No laughing, Francis, and pray for your internal apparatus."

30 Mam visits me on Thursdays. She says my father is back at work at Rank's Flour Mills and please God this job will last a while with the war on and the English desperate for flour. **A**

Patricia gives Seamus, the man who mops the floors, a short history of England for me. He tries to sing me a song, but the Kerry nurse threatens to report him to Sister Rita.

The book tells about all the kings and queens of England. It includes the first bit of Shakespeare I ever read. I don't know what it means, but it's like having jewels in my mouth when I say the words.

40 Patricia reads me a verse from "The Highwayman" every day. I can't wait to learn a new verse and find out what's happening to the highwayman and the landlord's red-lipped daughter. I love the poem because it's exciting and almost as good as my two lines of Shakespeare.

Patricia's ready to read the last few verses when in comes the nurse from Kerry shouting at us. "I told ye there was to be no talking between rooms. Diphtheria is never allowed to talk to typhoid and visa versa." And she makes Seamus take me upstairs.

50 He whispers, "I'm sorry, Frankie," as he slips the book under my shirt and lifts me from the bed.

Sister Rita stops us to say I'm a great disappointment to her and that I'll have plenty of time to reflect on my sins in the big ward upstairs and I should beg God's forgiveness for my disobedience reciting a pagan English poem about a thief on a horse when I could have been praying. **B C D**

60 There are twenty beds in the ward, all white, all empty. The nurse tells Seamus to put me at the far end of the ward to make sure I don't talk to anyone, which is very unlikely since there isn't another soul on this whole floor. She tells me this was the fever ward during the Great Famine³ long ago. She says, "'Twould break your heart to think of what the English did to us, no pity at

3. The **Great Famine** was a time when potato crops failed in 1845–1847. About one million people in Ireland starved to death as a result.

all for the little children with their mouths all green from trying to eat the grass, God bless us and save us.”

The nurse takes my temperature. “’Tis up a bit. Have a good sleep for yourself now that you’re away from the chatter with Patricia Madigan below who will never know a gray hair.” **E**

70 Nurses and nuns never think you know what they’re talking about. You can’t show you understood that Patricia is going to die. You can’t show you want to cry over this girl who taught you a lovely poem which the nun says is bad.

Seamus tells me the nurse is a right ol’ witch for running to Sister Rita and complaining about the poem going between the two rooms. “Anyway, Frankie, you’ll be outa here one of these fine days,” he says, “and you can read all the poetry you want though I don’t know about Patricia below, God help us.”

80 He knows about Patricia in two days because she collapsed and died in the bathroom. There are tears on his cheeks when he says, “She told me she was sorry she had you reciting that poem and getting you shifted from the room, Frankie. She said ’twas all her fault.”

“It wasn’t, Seamus.”

“I know and didn’t I tell her that.”

Now I’ll never know what happened to the highwayman and Bess, the landlord’s daughter. Seamus says he’ll ask the men in his local pub where there’s always someone reciting something and he’ll bring it back to me.

90 I can’t sleep because I see people in the other beds all dying and green around their mouths and moaning for soup Protestant soup any soup and I cover my face with the pillow hoping they won’t come and stand around the bed howling for bits of my chocolate bar. **F**

I can’t have any more visitors. Sister Rita says after my bad behavior with Patricia and that poem I can’t have the privilege anymore. **G** She says I’ll be going home in a few weeks and I must concentrate on getting better.

E QUICK CHECK

What does Sister Rita mean when she says that Patricia “will never know a gray hair”?

F YOUR TURN

Literary Focus

In this paragraph, Frank imagines starving children surrounding him. Underline the portion of the paragraph that makes the **tone** more lighthearted.

G YOUR TURN

Vocabulary

What does the word *privilege* mean?

A LITERARY ANALYSIS

Why does the poem make Seamus so sad?

I don't want to be in this
empty ward with ghosts of
children and no Patricia and
no highwayman and no red-
lipped landlord's daughter.

100
Seamus says a man in his
pub knew all the verses of the
highwayman poem. Seamus
has carried me the poem in
his head. He stands in the
middle of the ward leaning
on his mop and recites how
Bess warned the highwayman
by shooting herself dead with
110 a redcoat's musket and how
the highwayman returns for
revenge only to be shot down
by the redcoats.

*Blood-red were his spurs
in the golden noon; wine-
red was his velvet coat,
When they shot him down
on the highway, Down like
a dog on the highway,
120 And he lay in his blood on
the highway, with a bunch
of lace at his throat.*

Seamus wipes his sleeve across his face and snuffles. He says,
“Tis a very sad story and when I said it to my wife she cried all
evening. Now if you want to know any more poems, Frankie,
tell me and I'll get them from the pub and bring 'em back in my
head.” **A**



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