

**Review: *Teacher Man: A Memoir* by Frank McCourt
(Scribner, 2005. 272 pp.)**

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I loved the other great books by Frank McCourt, but I had never read this one. I was lucky to come across a copy in one of my favorite Chicago thrift shops—where I find lots of goodies! *Angela's Ashes* is one of my favorite books, and other writing by McCourt calls to me also. I hope I can find the time to read the rest of his work.

In *Teacher Man*, McCourt is able to make the tragic something we can endure and the crazy something we can laugh at. He can also take the impossible, the terrible, and the disgusting and turn it into the stuff of lessons—literally and symbolically. He teaches through his story-telling.

Teachers will all see through a lot of his yarns and predicaments ... discovering underneath a lot of the foolishness of everyday life the author's ability to teach. Through his writing, through this book, and of course through the classroom activities and memories he shares, he is always a teacher.

Remember that he was a teacher of English, and of literature, and most importantly, of writing. It is his unorthodox approaches to the teaching of writing that any teacher will marvel at in this book. Certainly good teachers of writing will see themselves in his actions and words used for many years in the classroom.

He tells some very heartfelt stories, and tells us about the crazy characters he teaches in many classes during his career. He also tells us about the crazy bosses, and the excellent ones, he has to deal with over the years. We have all had those bosses who “just do not get it” and others whose shoes we would gladly shine for them. His encounters with colorful personalities in the classroom and hallway are just as fun as the ones with helpful or deranged or intrusive parents in the different – and disparate – types of schools in which he teaches.

He taught in public high schools in New York City and a year in the college system there. His ancestors, family, and neighbors of old in Ireland, and his current comrades in America, show the influences all the others people have in an individual's life. He has met many interesting people in his life, had relationships, and struggled to figure out the meaning of life (he even worked on the docks). He gives us great insight to all kinds of immigrant experiences, including his own.

He includes some of the funniest passages I have ever seen in a book. His style and his ability to manipulate the reader—through the use of sardonic and twisting adventures—are enthralling aspects of his writing. Teachers will love how he talks about all the typical personalities in a high school class and the way he lets each of them shine in their own way.

The story is, of course, a wonderful one if people are into teaching. Although others will like the book—especially if they have grown up with tales of Ireland in their kitchen—but teachers will by far be the ones who enjoy this book. What are you waiting for?