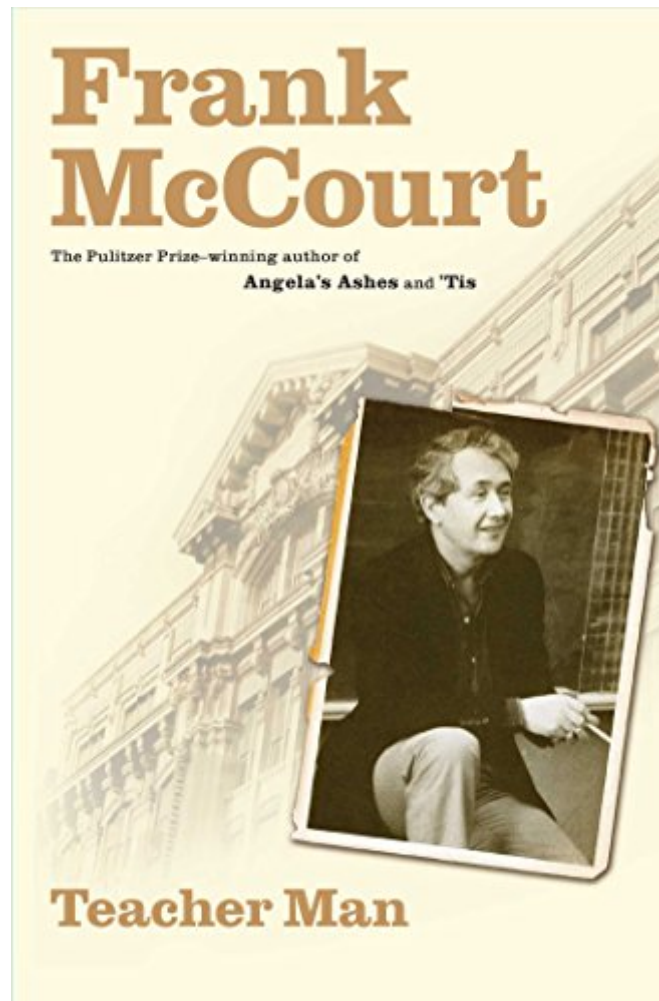


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# Teacher Man: A Memoir (The Frank McCourt Memoirs)



## Synopsis

Nearly a decade ago Frank McCourt became an unlikely star when, at the age of sixty-six, he burst onto the literary scene with *Angela's Ashes*, the Pulitzer Prize -- winning memoir of his childhood in Limerick, Ireland. Then came *'Tis*, his glorious account of his early years in New York. Now, here at last, is McCourt's long-awaited book about how his thirty-year teaching career shaped his second act as a writer. *Teacher Man* is also an urgent tribute to teachers everywhere. In bold and spirited prose featuring his irreverent wit and heartbreaking honesty, McCourt records the trials, triumphs and surprises he faces in public high schools around New York City. His methods anything but conventional, McCourt creates a lasting impact on his students through imaginative assignments (he instructs one class to write "An Excuse Note from Adam or Eve to God"), singalongs (featuring recipe ingredients as lyrics), and field trips (imagine taking twenty-nine rowdy girls to a movie in Times Square!). McCourt struggles to find his way in the classroom and spends his evenings drinking with writers and dreaming of one day putting his own story to paper. *Teacher Man* shows McCourt developing his unparalleled ability to tell a great story as, five days a week, five periods per day, he works to gain the attention and respect of unruly, hormonally charged or indifferent adolescents. McCourt's rocky marriage, his failed attempt to get a Ph.D. at Trinity College, Dublin, and his repeated firings due to his propensity to talk back to his superiors ironically lead him to New York's most prestigious school, Stuyvesant High School, where he finally finds a place and a voice. "Doggedness," he says, is "not as glamorous as ambition or talent or intellect or charm, but still the one thing that got me through the days and nights." For McCourt, storytelling itself is the source of salvation, and in *Teacher Man* the journey to redemption -- and literary fame -- is an exhilarating adventure.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

McCourties of the world rejoice! You have nothing to lose but your tears of woe anticipating when he'd return with his next book; the foremost memoirist of our time is back. Frank McCourt's "Teacher Man" is a spellbinding lyrical ode to the craft of teaching. It is a rollicking, delightful trek across nearly thirty years in New York City public school classrooms that will surely please his devout legion of fans, and perhaps win some new admirers too. Truly, without question, it is a splendid concluding volume in his trilogy of memoirs that began in spectacular fashion with "Angela's Ashes". Indeed, we find much of the same plain, yet rather poetic, prose and rich dark humor that defines his first book, along with his undiminished, seemingly timeless, skill as a mesmerizing raconteur. Is McCourt truly now one of the great writers of our time if he isn't already, with the publication of "Teacher Man"? I will say only that he was a marvellous teacher (I still feel lucky to have been a prize-winning student of his.), and that this new memoir truly captures the spirit of what it was like to be a student in his classroom. "Teacher Man" opens with a hilarious Prologue that would seem quite self-serving if written by someone other than Frank McCourt, in which he reviews his star-struck existence in the nine years since the original publication of "Angela's Ashes". In Part I (It's a Long Road to Pedagogy) he dwells on the eight years he spent at McKee Vocational High School in Staten Island. It starts, promisingly enough, with him on the verge of ending his teaching career, just as it begins in the lawless Wild West frontier of a McKee classroom (I was nearly in stitches laughing out loud, after learning why he was nearly fired on two consecutive days, no less.).

In "Teacher Man," Frank McCourt sheepishly looks back on his thirty years of teaching, and admits that he wasn't always comfortable educating adolescents. He candidly states in his prologue, "How I became a teacher at all and remained one is a miracle." This memoir is a bittersweet look back at McCourt's not entirely successful career in the New York City Public High Schools, and at the often

hilarious goings-on in his classrooms. As he made clear in his Pulitzer-Prize winning "Angela's Ashes," McCourt had a miserable and impoverished childhood in Ireland. His alcoholic father walked out when Frank was ten. Three of his siblings died. Frank's schoolmasters were always quick to beat their recalcitrant charges with sticks, straps, and canes. He left school at fourteen and fled to America, where he worked as a manual laborer. McCourt was a man with horrible memories, low self-esteem, and no goals. After he served a stint in the U. S. army, McCourt dozed through four years of New York University on the GI Bill. At the age of twenty-seven, he became a teacher after barely passing his licensing examination. When he began his first teaching job at McKee Vocational and Technical High School in Staten Island, it didn't take long for him to realize that he was in way over his head. Merely getting the kids to pay attention to him would count as a major triumph. "Teacher Man" is a story of survival. McCourt basically threw out the standard English curriculum and played it by ear. He told stories of his wretched years in Ireland instead of diagramming sentences and discussing great works of literature. He had the students talk about their experiences and make up original stories.

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