

*from Angela's Ashes* by Frank McCourt

## Reading: Use Background Information to Determine the Author's Purpose

One way to determine the **author's purpose**, or reason, for writing a nonfiction work is to use **background information** that you already know about the author and topic. For example, knowing that an author grew up outside the United States might help you determine that he wrote a story to inform readers about the country where he spent his youth.

Although he was born in the United States, Frank McCourt spent his childhood and teen years in Ireland. The reader learns some of this information in the excerpt from *Angela's Ashes*, which is set in the Irish hospital where the ten-year-old McCourt recovered from typhoid fever. For example, McCourt writes the following about one of the nurses in the hospital:

She's a very stern nurse from the County Kerry and she frightens me.

The author's purpose for writing this sentence is twofold: (a) to inform the reader that the story takes place in Ireland (County Kerry is a southwestern county of Ireland) and (b) to help establish a mood by portraying the harsh and frightening personality of the nurse. In addition to informing or creating a mood, an author might write a passage in order to entertain the reader.

**DIRECTIONS:** Read each of these passages from the excerpt from *Angela's Ashes*. Decide whether the author's purpose is to inform, to create a mood, or to entertain. Write the purpose on the line following the passage. A passage may have more than one purpose.

1. I have diphtheria and something else.

What's something else?

They don't know. They think I have a disease from foreign parts because my father used to be in Africa. I nearly died. . . .

**Author's purpose(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

2. 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 against the wall to make sure I don't talk to anyone who might be passing the door, which is very unlikely since there isn't another soul on this whole floor.

**Author's purpose(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

3. [The nurse] leaves and there's silence for a while. Then Patricia whispers, Give thanks, Francis, give thanks, and say your rosary, Francis, and I laugh so hard a nurse runs in to see if I'm all right. . . .

**Author's purpose(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

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## Open-Book Test

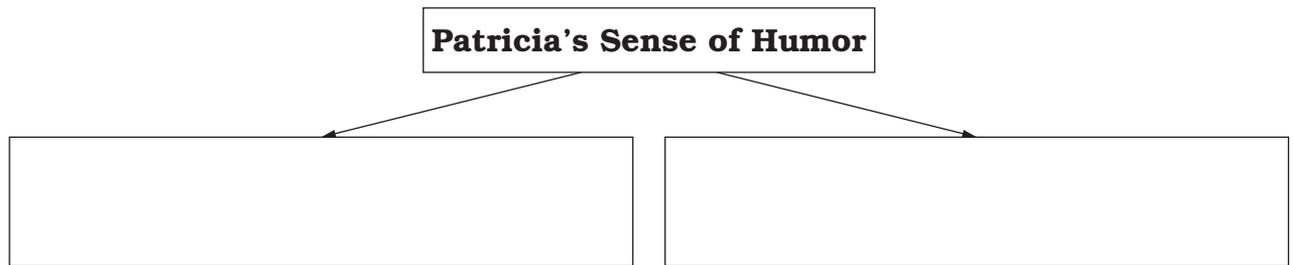
**Short Answer** Write your responses to the questions in this section on the lines provided.

1. At the beginning of the excerpt from *Angela's Ashes*, a nurse tells the narrator that his recovery from typhoid is "a miracle." What does the nurse's use of the word *miracle* tell you about typhoid?

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2. In the excerpt from *Angela's Ashes*, Patricia Madigan is shown to have a sense of humor. Use this diagram to analyze Patricia's sense of humor. In each blank box, write an example of something funny that she says or does. Then, on the line below, briefly explain the author's purpose for including these details.



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3. In the excerpt from *Angela's Ashes*, Mam relates that Frank's father is working at a flour mill. She expresses hope that his job will last as long as the war is going on and the English need flour badly. Why does Frank's mother believe that those factors will allow her husband to keep his job?

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4. In the excerpt from *Angela's Ashes*, Mam says that the English are "desperate for flour." In the Fever Hospital, it seems that Frank and Patricia are desperate for something as well. Explain what that is. Base your answer on the definition of *desperate*.

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5. Think about what Seamus does for the two sick children in the excerpt from *Angela's Ashes*. What kind of person is he? Support your answer by citing a detail from the selection.

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6. In the excerpt from *Angela's Ashes*, Frank and Patricia grow close in a short period of time. What factors allow them to become close friends very quickly?

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7. In the excerpt from *Angela's Ashes*, how does the long-standing conflict between Ireland and England affect Frank and Patricia? Cite a detail from the selection to support your answer.

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8. In the excerpt from *Angela's Ashes*, Frank McCourt portrays the nurse from Kerry and Sister Rita. What is McCourt's purpose in describing these two health-care workers? Explain the effect they have on the passage.

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9. Toward the end of the excerpt from *Angela's Ashes*, a nurse talks to Frank and Seamus about the Great Famine. On the basis of the nurse's account, describe how the Great Famine affected the relationship between the Irish and the English.

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10. At the end of the excerpt from *Angela's Ashes*, Seamus tells Frank about Patricia's death. He says, "Tis a dirty rotten thing to die in a lavatory when you're lovely in yourself." Explain what Seamus means.

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### Essay

Write an extended response to the question of your choice or to the question or questions your teacher assigns you.

11. Think about the children's experiences in the hospital in this excerpt from *Angela's Ashes*. In particular, consider how the nurses' attitudes and actions affected Frank and Patricia. In an essay, discuss the treatment the two children received in the hospital. Cite two details that show why the hospital was not a comforting place for them.

12. As you read the excerpt from *Angela's Ashes*, you learn something about young Frank McCourt. Think about the events in the story and Frank's reaction to them. Then, in an essay, describe young Frank. Cite details from the excerpt to support your description of the boy in the hospital. In particular, cite details that suggest that Frank will become a writer later in life.
13. The excerpt from *Angela's Ashes* is written from the point of view of the author, Frank McCourt. Suppose that Patricia had written this story. In an essay, describe how her version might differ from McCourt's.
14. **Thinking About the Big Question: What is the best way to find the truth?** In the excerpt from *Angela's Ashes*, there are two references to the anger felt by many Irish for the English. Frank McCourt conveys the information by quoting Sister Rita and the Kerry nurse, but he does not reveal how he feels. In an essay, discuss how Frank McCourt might best find the truth that lies behind the bad feelings between the Irish and the English. Cite at least one detail from the excerpt to support your ideas.

### Oral Response

15. Go back to question 5, 7, or 8 or to the question your teacher assigns you. Take a few minutes to expand your answer and prepare an oral response. Find additional details in the excerpt from *Angela's Ashes* that support your points. If necessary, make notes to guide your oral response.