World Literature

European & Russian Literature: Typhoid Fever

In groups, read and discuss the following questions.

**Typhoid Fever (pg. 365)**

1. Background: Frank McCourt grew up in a slum in Limerick, Ireland, where crowded and dirty conditions caused the spread of diseases like typhoid fever and diphtheria. What other diseases do you know of that spread easily? What might it be like to grow up in a slum?
2. On page 367, McCourt mentions that his father is “back at work as Rank’s Flour Mills and please God this job will last a while with the war on and the English desperate for flour.” What war is he referring to? Why would the English be desperate for flour?
3. Evaluate Credibility: Do you believe McCourt’s recollection of the hospital’s rules about laughing and singing?
4. How would you describe Frankie’s personality? Give at least three descriptors and explain why you would describe him in these ways. (resentful, mistrustful, withdrawn, compassionate, courageous, resilient . . . )
5. In your opinion, what was the saddest of most shocking episode in Frankie’s story?
6. The Kerry nurse asks sharply, “What is there to laugh about?” Find two examples of comic relief in McCourt’s memoir. How do you feel about the use of comedy in such a sad story?
7. What do you think young Frankie discovered about himself in the hospital? Be sure to consider the role that language, and especially poetry, plays in this story.
8. McCourt’s mother called one of his stories “a pack of lies,” but one reviewer says *Angela’s Ashes* is “a truth-teller’s work.” Using examples from “Typhoid Fever,” discuss the writer’s credibility. Do you thing parts of the story sound as if they were made-up?
9. Pablo Picasso said “Art is lies that tell the truth.” What do you think he means by this? Do you think a made-up story can tell a truth?

Homework: Find “The Highwayman” online (read the poem and look it up on you-tube – there are many great animated versions to a song that was made from the poem!). Summarize the poem and explain why Seamus’ wife might have been so moved by the poem.