

# One flew over the cuckoo's nest free narrative essay



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Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is considered one of the seminal works of 1960's American literature. The unique components and distinctive features used to portray themes and ideas of Kesey's in the novel which account for its high regard include: characters and language devices. Individuality is a key concept that constantly features in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* through themes such as individuality and free expression and society's destruction of individuality.

This idea was important in the 1960's America as it was a time that saw the Re-emergence of Individualism. Oppression is another theme in the novel with the institution being much alike the oppressive American society. Along with these, Kesey's thoughts on women is also an idea that acts as parallel between the novel and the American society of the 1960s as it was a time of women's liberation. Kesey effectively utilises language techniques to assist in developing his theme of society's destruction of individuality and in turn setting the novel as an influential piece. The metaphor of the Combine is an example of a link between the novel and the counter culture movement of the 1960's. The idea of the combine as a dominating force which strips people of their individuality and pressures them to conform to socially constructed norms is much alike the force which had to be confronted by the members of the counter culture movement.

In the novel the responder is made aware of how the institution completely destroys the patients individuality through symbolism in Chief Bromden's dream. "there's no blood or innards falling out like I was looking to see-just a shower of dust and ashes, and now and again a piece of wire or glass. The rust that pours out when Blastic is cut open symbolises that the institution

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has turned him into a robot which just conforms; society has destroyed his humanity as well as his life. The institution acts as a microcosm for the whole 1960's society and by depicting the faults in the institution Kesey is, basically, pointing out the faults in society.

The theme of society's destruction of individuality and the features Kesey used to portray it without doubt contributed to the high regard that the novel received. The portrayal of Oppression, the struggle against and the triumph over it in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* through Kesey's the use of symbolism make it a fundamental work of the era. Bromden recounts the time when three government officials came to buy the tribe's land so they could build a hydroelectric dam, but Bromden was the only one there. When he tried to speak to the officials, they ignored him and didn't even acknowledge that he was there. , “(quote about Bromden's family and the hydro electric dam)” Chief Bromden's becomes a symbolic character in relation to the period of the 1950-60's.

One of the many organisations of that time fighting against oppression in society was The American Indian Movement which was formed to attend to a variety of issues concerning the Native American. Bromden, as a Half-Indian Native American, is symbolic of the oppression felt by Native American. Kesey uses hyperbole by making Bromden dumb and deaf to show the impact the oppression has. He has been oppressed to the extent that he has lost the ability to be heard in the institution or in society.

This is relevant to Native American in the era as they also wouldn't have felt like they were incapable of being heard. The American Indian Movement

gave those people a voice just as McMurphy did for Bromden. The institution in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is a metaphor for the oppressive nature of 1950-60 American society. Individuality and free expression as a theme in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is effectively portrayed through Kesey's clever choice of unique characters.

McMurphy serves as a Christ-like figure in the novel and represents individuality and free expression. When juxtaposed with the other patients in the hospital the reader can truly see the extent to which society and the institution has moulded them, though it hasn't yet had the chance to do the same to McMurphy. He begins to feel sorry for the patients and feels the need to help them. Whilst doing so he must fight the force of society and maintain his individuality.

McMurphy manages this until his objective of assisting the others reclaim their individuality is fulfilled. Although, his actions cost him dearly and he winds up paying the ultimate price just as Christ did for mankind. McMurphy himself is a parallel between the book and 1960's America as he represents the hippies in the counter culture movement who challenged authority and influenced change by leading others to rebel. Just as the hippies tried to influence change by prompting people to question society and go against the norm McMurphy similarly challenged the patients to break free from the clutches of society and the institution and to find their individuality. The unique characters that were used to convey Kesey's idea of individuality and free expression made *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* stand out and also easily relatable by the people of that time and consequently noted it as an influential work. Kesey uses characters, symbolism and metaphors in *One*  
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Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest to present his thoughts on one of the many changes society was undergoing during that time being women's liberation.

Kesey demonstrates his strong opposition to women's liberation as the novel is very male orientated and the women within it are portrayed negatively. The idea that most, if not all, of the male characters have been damaged in one way or another by a relationship with dominating women enforces his negative view of women. Harding states, " We are victims of a matriarchy here. " In order to maintain authority and power women have to separate themselves from their femininity. Nurse Ratched herself recognises this and she does it by concealing her most obvious womanly feature, her large breasts.

McMurphy challenges her authority and control by revealing her femininity when he rips her blouse open.