

# One flew over the cuckoo's nest

Literature



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One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest is Narrated by Chief Bromden, the son of a Native American father and a white mother. He has been a patient in an Oregon psychiatric hospital for ten years where he pretends to be deaf and dumb. This story focuses on the behavior of jubilantly seditious Randle McMurphy, a transferee from a prison workfarm to Oregon psychiatric hospital. The insane patients, all male, are separated into Acutes, who can be cured, and Chronics, who cannot be cured. The hospital ward is run by the reticent, middle-aged Nurse Ratched and her orderlies, with little medical oversight.

She manipulates the men by encouraging them to spy on each other and take part in group meeting where they orally attack each other. If a patient protests, he is provided electroshock treatments and occasionally a lobotomy. The fiction begins with the admittance of McMurphy to the hospital. He relentlessly provokes the Big Nurse, upsets routine, gambles, makes indecorous sexual comments, and tries to make as much nuisance as he can. He sings when he is not asked to, asks for things when it is not time to, and turns up half nude, which actually agitates Nurse Ratched. She instantly marks McMurphy as a manipulator.

He attempts to make the patients happy by securing a game room for them, which is more to his advantage than anything else He tries to affirm his spanking leadership position in the midst of the patients by demanding permission to watch the World Series on the ward's television set. When this permission is rejected, he turns the television on anyhow. While, Ratched shuts off the electricity to the television as she controls the power.

McMurphy however, stages a strike by sitting before the blank television

screen as opposed to doing his job, and individually the other patients too join him.

All of them assemble facing the blank screen, laughing and joking the entire week. Consequently, Nurse Ratched loses control and yells at them.

Bromden comments that a stranger would consider all of them were mad, together with the nurse. During the subsequent staff meeting, the doctors attempt to identify McMurphy with everything from concealed homosexuality to schizophrenia; the single thing that they can agree on is that he is an abnormal man, and indeed may be dangerous. On the other hand, Nurse Ratched asserts that McMurphy is not an abnormal man and is put through all the fears and nervousness of the other men.

Nurse Ratched is certain that she can crack McMurphy, for he is dedicated to the hospital and they can choose when he will be released. However, McMurphy continues to annoy her. Although he has already sowed the seeds of uprising in his fellow patients, he backs off from his rebellious behavior when a lifeguard, tells him that he must stick to Ratched's policy or risk her extending his sentence for an indefinite period. So, his fellow patients are bewildered when he stops standing up for them. Cheswick, disappointed when McMurphy fails to join him in a stand against Nurse Ratched, drowns in the swimming pool in a potential suicide.

Subsequently McMurphy resumes to his rebellious conduct, shattering a window to get at the cigarettes, a symbolic blow that relates to Cheswick's lost encounter with Ratched. She, in turn, remains passive and does little to strike back, because she knows that she can extend the battle. The Nurse

has her subsequent success when Seefeld, an epileptic who declines to take his medicine, has a seizure. She tells everyone that she is always right and if Seefeld had adhered to her medication orders, the attack would have been prevented, which the other patients believe her.

McMurphy asks for an Accompanied Pass to go oceanic fishing, and attempts to sign up patients to go with him; the Nurse tries fruitlessly to prevent this. Even Chief Bromden, who until that time pretended to be a deaf mute, begins talking to McMurphy and accompanies them on the excursion, which turns out to be a success. Everybody drinks, fishes, and has a nice time. The trip appears to make them all stronger and courageous. Subsequent move of Nurse Ratched is to put down McMurphy in the eyes of the other patients. She arranges for a gathering behind in his absence and plants a seed of distrust about his selfless intentions.

The ward patients are simply persuaded that McMurphy's only rationale is to make money; this faith is energized when he gets them to bet on whether the Chief can lift the control panel in which McMurphy wins the bet. Shortly, the patients understand they are wrong about McMurphy when he gets into a clash with the orderlies. As a result of the clash, McMurphy and the Chief are sent to the Disturbed ward and given shock treatment. McMurphy gets several treatments as he declines to express regret. Chief Bromden returns to the ward earlier than McMurphy, and realizes that he and McMurphy are now heroes to the other patients.

He discloses to the patients his capability to talk and informs the men about McMurphy. McMurphy's absence from the ward his legend among the men.

When he finally returns, McMurphy tries to conceal the psychological twist he is enduring with a fake illustration of boldness. While he attempts to act like nothing is wrong, he discloses in his facial appearance and in his actions that he is exhausted. McMurphy does not even join them, when the other patients sketch an escape from the hospital; he is no longer resilient to face the outer world.

McMurphy breaks into the pharmacy and smuggles bottles of liquor and two prostitutes into the ward for a party after bribing the night orderly. He encourages one of the women to have sex with Billy Bibbit, who is still a virgin. McMurphy and the other patients fall asleep forgetting to clean up before the morning shift arrives. The staff discovers the chaos the next morning, igniting a series of brutal proceedings. When The Big Nurse finds Billy Bibbit and the prostitute in each other's arms, half nude, she frightens to notify Billy's mother.

As a result, Billy becomes panic-stricken and commits suicide by cutting his throat, an action that Ratched blames on McMurphy's manipulation.

McMurphy responds by tearing open the front of her dress and trying to strangle her. In retaliation, he is removed to the Disturbed ward, where he experiences lobotomy, and returns to the ward weeks later in a vegetable state. The Chief understands that if other patients see McMurphy in that state, Nurse Ratched will have finally "won," undermining the patients who were only beginning to declare themselves as men because of McMurphy's inspiration.

So, the Chief suffocates McMurphy with a pillow and throws the control panel in the tub room through the window and escapes from the hospital. Personal Theme Analysis Emasculation and societal suppression of individuality The novel exposes that Nurse Ratched attempts to emasculate the patients. She frightens and controls them through fear. When she is ineffective in gaining control over a patient, she orders electroshock treatments to achieve her goal. When she cannot successfully render McMurphy powerless, she gets him lobotomized so that she can control him and use him as an example to other patients.

Thus, the suppressive society cannot tolerate a man like McMurphy, who is strong enough to teach others about the wrongs around them. He denies conforming to the rules of the suppressive society and protests against it; consequently, he is shattered through a lobotomy that renders him incapable of thinking or acting against the exploitive forces. Like many other patients, Billy has been squeezed into submission and his individuality has been buried. Billy is dominated by his mother, who does not regard him a man, and treats him like an infant.

When Nurse Ratched frightens to tell his mother that Billy had sex with a prostitute, he is so frightened and humiliated that he cuts his own throat into a possible suicide. Basically being an Indian, the Chief has been treated as subhuman. He was disregarded and pushed into invisibility by the government who acquired his father's land. His father, who was a physically powerful man, became a drunkard because of society's carnage. The Chief's father is made "small" by his white wife, who joins with the government people to persuade her husband to sell his land.

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She renders him helpless and useless, causing him to become a drunkard. Overall Theme Analysis Importance of Sexual Freedom It is repeatedly highlighted that Nurse Ratched has huge breasts, which she tries to hide them. Firstly, McMurphy notices the Big Nurse emasculating and weakening the men. He portrays her as a "ball-cutter" (Kesey, 58). Alternatively, the ward is like a matriarchal society which emasculates men. Distinctly, McMurphy is utterly open about sex and adores his masculine sexual power by repeatedly making sexual comments to the Big Nurse.

He explains the doctor about the legal rape charge against him without any disgrace claiming that the girl lied about her age and was as much the mastermind of the act as he was. McMurphy argues that Billy Bibbit should really be out hunting girls rather than being imprisoned in a psychiatric ward. He obviously believes that Billy can overcome his stammer by having sex with the prostitute. At the end, when McMurphy attacks the Big Nurse, tears her dress and reveals her breasts. Thus he neutralizes her power by showing her sexual identity as a woman. This is part of the reason that her power over the men is broken.

The visible sight of her femininity frees them to be more like men. (Novel Guide) False Diagnoses of Insanity McMurphy's common sense is indicated by his free laughter, open sexuality, strength, size, and confidence, which stands contrary to what Kesey suggests, ironically and tragically, is a psychiatric hospital. Even Nurse Ratched relates her colleague that McMurphy appears to be a manipulator. The insanity of the ward is focused when a man who asks a simple question is tortured and rendered inhuman.

Only a rational man would question an irrational system, but the act of questioning means his sanity will necessarily be settled. Spark Notes) All over the novel, the sane actions of men contrast with the insane actions of the institution. When McMurphy and the patients stage a protest against Nurse Ratched for not letting them watch the World Series, a sensible request for which McMurphy produces a sensible solution, she loses control and, as Bromden notes, looks as crazy as they do. For example, Bromden's imagination about unseen machinery may seem crazy, but in actuality they reveal his insight into the hospital's dangerous power over the patients.

(Spark Notes) Rebellion against Authority and Conformism

The mental ward where the novel takes place resembles a miniature copy of society, where the Big Nurse represents the society. She symbolizes order, proficiency, domination, slavery and cruelty. She fulfills the need of society to "repair" those who do not fit into its model. If they decline, they are crushed by electro-shock therapy and brain surgery. McMurphy works for the spirit of the group against the Big Nurse, by symbolizing spontaneity, instinct, sexuality, individuality, and free will. This is the fundamental conflict of the novel. McMurphy tries to persuade freedom and impulsiveness in the men to defeat the Big Nurse.

For example, during the fishing trip the men revive their own power in a natural environment. Later they revel at night in the ward, when all the suppressive rules of the Combine are broken in a drunken party. (Novel Guide) Chief Bromden plays a vital role in this theme of repression and freedom. The fact that in the hospital the Chief pretends to be deaf and dumb indicates the total suppression of a more natural, individualized way of

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life. It is fitting therefore that at the end of the novel Bromden escapes, and there are hints that perhaps some of the way of life that he remembers from his boyhood can be evoked. (Novel Guide)

## **Works Cited**

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