

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest – Ken Kesey***Part 1*****➤ Reading #1 – p. 9-41 (32 pages) Study Guide Questions:**

1. List all the information you learn about the narrator of the novel. What seems to be his main problems? What is the fog “rolling in” a metaphor for?
2. What is the narrator’s perception of the Nurse? Of the Black boys? How are these perceptions cartoon-like or “unreal”?
3. Describe McMurphy’s physical attributes as well as personality and behavior. What makes him a “different kind” of admission?
4. Identify: acutes and chronics. List the patients that fit into each category, along with a description/characteristic that will help you remember who they are.
5. Discuss the significance of the discussion regarding the “head bull goose loony.”
6. Nurse Ratched calls McMurphy a “manipulator.” Is this accurate? Provide three examples of this. Why is she concerned about him?
7. Who is Mr. Taber, and why is he considered a “success”? Why would the Nurse’s eyes “get far-off and pleased with the memory” when she thinks about Mr. Taber?
8. What is the Combine? What is the relationship of Nurse Ratched, McMurphy and the Chief to the Combine?
9. How does Big Nurse maintain her control over the ward? What “methods” does she use? Why has she chosen the people she works with (black boys and Dr. Spivey)?
10. What is her *real* goal, concerning the patients? What constitutes a successful Dismissal?

➤ Reading #2 – p. 42-69 (27 pages) Study Guide Questions:

1. Why hasn’t Chief let himself get totally lost in the fog?
2. What information about McMurphy does Nurse Ratched reveal during Group Therapy?
3. Nurse Ratched gives Pete a shot. Is this necessary? Why does she do it? Why is he “beyond the reach of the machine”?
4. What goes on during Group Therapy? What is its function? Explain Big Nurse’s “plan of attack.” Connect the words **emasculate** and **matriarchy** to group therapy.
5. How does McMurphy describe the session? How is McMurphy more helpful than a group therapy session?
6. Harding initially states, “the staff desires our cure as much as we do. They aren’t monsters” (56). Does Harding really believe this? Discuss why he lies.
7. Why does Harding state they are all rabbits? Why is the Dr. also a rabbit? How do the animal references relate to the type of therapy that is/is not taking place?
8. McMurphy claims, “this ain’t the Middle Ages. There’s not a thing in the world that she can [do]” (63). Is this true? How is this statement ironic? Why don’t the men just punch Big Nurse or tell her off?
9. List any examples of Christ imagery and/or religious references in this section.
10. What bet does McMurphy make with the men on the ward? Why does he do this? What makes McMurphy think he has “an edge” on the nurse? Does he?
11. What is Nurse Ratched’s (modern matriarchy’s) one weakness?

➤ Reading #3 – p. 70-101 (31 pages) Study Guide Questions:

1. How does Chief describe time passing? How do the clocks work?
2. What is bothering McMurphy that no one else seems to notice?
3. Why does McMurphy let the men win at cards eventually? (two reasons)
4. Why does the nurse with the birthmark tell McMurphy: “Stay back, I’m Catholic!” (76). Explain the humor in this line. Why is her reaction ironic or inappropriate?
5. Describe the boxer shorts that McMurphy receives from the literary major (student). What literary allusion and symbolism can you connect to the shorts?
6. What has McMurphy discovered about Chief? How does he discover this?
7. Describe Chief’s night fantasy. What *reality* is woven into his dream/vision?
8. Explain why the Chief calls the night orderly by his name (Mr. Turkle), while he only refers to the day orderlies as the “Black boys.”
9. How is McMurphy like Pete? (consider their relationship with the Comblin)
10. Describe the toothpaste incident and the questions McMurphy asks. What insights into Mac’s character can we gain from this incident? Who is truly sane/crazy?
11. Even though she does eventually regain her composure, what upsets Nurse Ratched the **most** about McMurphy (and his behavior) this morning? Why? What *truly* significant event (that occurred overnight) is ignored?
12. Describe McMurphy’s “relationship” with the doctor? What minor victory do he and McMurphy achieve? What does Chief realize about the nurse and the Combine that McMurphy does not?

➤ Reading #4 – p. 102-128 (27 pages) Study Guide Questions:

1. Describe the Monopoly game. What do we learn about McMurphy’s personality?
2. What does McMurphy want to have a vote on? Why does the nurse object to his idea? What happens that upsets McMurphy with regards to the vote?
3. Why does McMurphy make a bet that he can lift the control panel (a bet that he most likely knows he will lose)?
4. What real life event does the Chief get the fog idea from? Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of being “lost in the fog.”
5. Explain how the word “matriarchy” applies to Billy Bibbit’s mom. When does he first begin to stutter?
6. What was the “cactus-moon” that affected Chief’s father?
7. What does McMurphy say he want to do again at group therapy? Why? How does Chief help McMurphy?
8. What does Big Nurse do to sabotage their World Series plans? Explain how McMurphy still wins in the end. How does McMurphy’s victory make the men more masculine?
9. Explain why Big Nurse loses her cool and what this means for McMurphy.
10. Explain the irony of this quote: “If somebody’d of come in and took a look, men watching a blank TV, a fifty-year-old woman hollering and squealing at the back of their heads about discipline and order and recriminations, they’d of thought the whole bunch was a crazy as loons” (128). Consider: Who is sane? Who is crazy?

Part 2

➤ Reading #5 – p. 129-151 (22 pages) Study Guide Questions:

1. What is Chief worried about now (after he helped to sway the vote)?
2. Describe what happens at the Staff Meeting. What do the doctor and the orderlies consider doing with McMurphy? Why does Big Nurse disagree with them?
3. Reread the last paragraph on p. 137. What does Big Nurse realize about McMurphy himself and his situation at the hospital?
4. Reread p. 140. What most amazes Chief about McMurphy? What is he able to do that most of the other guys in the ward cannot?
5. Describe what the Chief sees and thinks as he stands at the open window looking out at the moon (p. 138-144). Why is this behavior unusual for the Chief? Explain the significance or symbolism of the geese, the dog, and the car that Chief sees/hears out the window. How might the dog's behavior foreshadow future events in the novel?
6. What does McMurphy learn from the lifeguard at the swimming pool? How and why does this change his behavior? Who does he not support? (Be specific)
7. How do Big Nurse, Chief Bromden, and Cheswick feel about the changes in McMurphy's behavior? Why does each feel the way that he/she does?

➤ Reading #6 – p. 151-173 (22 pages) Study Guide Questions:

1. What happens to Sefelt? Why? How does Fredrickson react to it? How are both "damned if they do and damned if they don't" take their medicine (Dilantin)?
2. Describe Harding's wife. What do you think of her? Why? How do she and her husband get along/treat each other? What insinuations does she make about Harding?
3. McMurphy sets forth a personal philosophy during the discussion after Harding's wife's visit (p. 159). What is his idea? How does this relate to the way he treats the guys in the ward? Provide specific examples.
4. After Harding's wife leaves, McMurphy starts to get angry and withdrawn: "Quit bugging me, goddammit." After, he snaps at Martini, and when he tries to shuffle and cut a deck of cards, they seem to "explode between his two trembling hands" (160-161). What's wrong with Mack? Why does he feel/act this way?
5. As the Acutes sit on the bench waiting for chest X-rays, what does McMurphy learn about the types of inhumane "treatments" that have/do go on in the hospital?
6. What reason/explanation does McMurphy give the men as to why he won't be their "savior"? How does McMurphy misunderstand the patients' reasons for wanting him to do battle with Nurse Ratched?
7. Why don't the "voluntary" patients leave the hospital? How does this show that the men are **worse off** than McMurphy originally thought?
8. Why does Big Nurse insist on punishing the men by taking away their game room?
9. What does McMurphy do as retaliation against Big Nurse? Why is she so shocked?
10. Why do you suppose McMurphy decides to fight? How is McMurphy's rebellion at the end of Part 2 different from his rebellious actions in Part 1?

Part 3

➤ **Reading #6 – p. 174-195 (21.5 pages)** **Study Guide Questions:**

1. Give examples of the way McMurphy attempts to upset Big Nurse.
2. How does Nurse Ratched oppose McMurphy's plans for the fishing trip?
3. Which members of the ward are starting to act "stronger" (more like McMurphy)? Describe their actions/achievements.
4. How does the Chief react to the fishing proposal?
5. How do the Chief's recollections of his childhood explain his pretending to be deaf and dumb? What do we learn about Chief's past?
6. What prompts the Chief to speak? What happens after he begins to talk?
7. Explain how Chief sees himself and why he says his father is the same way. What does the Chief mean when he says he is *smaller* than McMurphy?
8. What does Chief "warn" McMurphy about?
9. Describe the deal McMurphy makes with the Chief. How does Chief "rebel" the next morning?
10. Describe how McMurphy gets George to sign up for the fishing trip. Why do they *need* him to go?

➤ **Reading #7 – p. 195-218 (22.5 pages)** **Study Guide Questions:**

1. How does the ward react to the arrival of Candy Starr?
2. List/describe all the problems/obstacles McMurphy encounters with regards to the fishing trip, and explain how he overcomes each one.
3. Describe the religious/Christ imagery in this section of the novel.
4. Describe the incident at the gas station. How do the attendants try to take advantage of the men, and how do they finally gain the upper hand?
5. How do the men react when the loafers in the town insult Candy Starr? Find a quote that supports how they feel.
6. Describe the fishing outing in general; then focus on two scenes that you see as significant and/or amusing.
7. How has this fishing trip changed the men? Provide specific examples of how Billy, Harding, Chief, and George change/grow.
8. How do the loafers treat the men when they return from their trip? How do you account for this change?
9. Why does McMurphy take the men to his childhood home and tell them the story of his first sexual encounter?
10. What is happening to McMurphy, emotionally and physically, as the other men get stronger? What toll have his actions (on behalf of the men) taken on him?

Part 4

➤ **Reading #9 – p. 219-241 (22 pages)** **Study Guide Questions:**

1. At the start of this section, Big Nurse renews her attack against McMurphy. What does she claim about McMurphy?
2. What do the men think of Nurse Ratched's accusation/suggestion (about McMurphy)? Find a line that describes their feelings. (220-226) Do they all agree? Who doesn't?

3. When Mack wins big money from Chief's lifting the control panel, he really loses. Explain why. How does McMurphy react to the Chief's charge that McMurphy is "always . . . winning things" (226)?
4. Mack gains back the confidence of the Acutes in the showers. How? Why does McMurphy start the fight in the shower room? Why does the Chief join him?
5. Describe the atmosphere in Disturbed. How are things/people different from the other ward?
6. How is the Christ imagery/metaphor extended in this reading selection? (see pp. 232-237)
7. Discuss the option Nurse Ratched offers McMurphy (with regards to his shock therapy). Why does he make the choice(s) that he does?
8. Describe what happens to Mack and the Chief during their shock treatment(s). What memories flash through Chief's mind?
9. From where does the title of the novel originate? Decide on whom the "one" is who "flew over the cuckoo's nest" and the one who is "plucked out." (Refer to class outline handout)

➤ **Reading #10 – p. 242-272 (30 pages)**

Study Guide Questions:

1. How is Chief changing? What is odd about his return to the ward?
2. Describe Billy's relationship with his mother? What is/is not unusual about it?
3. Give examples of the fun the men have on the ward the night of Sandy and Candy's visit. What rules are broken? Why doesn't McMurphy seem concerned?
4. What was Mr. Turkle suppose to do at 6:00 am? When the Nurse comes back on that morning, what does McMurphy have a chance to do? Why does he pass it up?
5. How do the men react to Big Nurse when she discovers their escapades? How have they changed?
6. Why does Billy commit suicide? (Give **two** reasons.) Who is at fault here?
7. The Chief says nobody could have stopped McMurphy from attacking Big Nurse. Why not? Explain why McMurphy attacks Big Nurse and the importance of the way he does it.
8. What changes occur on the ward after McMurphy is removed? Who finally leaves and why? (Discuss characters that grow stronger, providing specific examples of how.)
9. What's McMurphy like after they bring him back to the ward from the Shock Shop? Describe how the acutes act towards him and why?
10. Why must Chief do what he has to do at the end? Would you have done the same if you were in his shoes? Explain.
11. In the end, who "wins"? How do you know?