

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest Study Questions: Chapters 1-5

Chapter 1 (p. 3 - 8)

1. Who is the narrator, and how did he get this name?
2. What does the narrator believe the black aides are talking about? What else does he accuse the black aides of?
3. What episodes does the narrator suffer that suggest to the reader that he is genuinely psychologically disturbed?
4. Describe Nurse Ratched's physical appearance.

Chapter 2 (p. 9 - 14)

5. What do the black aides do with the chief's breakfast?
6. What does the Public Relations man say to visitors that the Chief notices? How is this important to the story?
7. What disturbing implication does the Chief make about what happens when the aides get a new admitted patient?
8. How does McMurphy differ from other patients as he enters the ward?
9. Why is McMurphy in the hospital?

Chapter 3 (p. 15 – 26)

10. What are the differences between Acutes and Chronics? Why do the Acutes write down information, much like spying, about each other in the nurse's book? Why does the Chief think the Big Nurse really wants this? How does the narrator explain the condition of the Chronics?
11. What two procedures used by the hospital have changed Acutes into Chronics? Briefly explain each procedure. What does this say about the attempts at physical therapy used in mental institutions at this time?
12. What veiled threat does the Nurse make to the Acutes when they act out of order?

13. What does McMurphy try to do as he comes on the ward? What position does he consider establishing for himself?

Chapter 4 (p. 27 – 41)

14. What is a “manipulator”? Why does Nurse Ratched smile to herself thinking about Mr. Taber?
15. How does the Chief describe the aides, and their suitability to Nurse Ratched?
16. Explain what Nurse Ratched means by the following comment: “Maybe after that take him to the electroencephalograph and check his head - we may find evidence of a need for brainwork.”

Chapter 5 (p. 42 – 75)

17. What issue does the group discuss at the beginning of the meeting? What can we infer about Harding’s “illness”?
18. Who has the power in the meeting - the Nurse or the doctor? What does this tell us?
19. What is the theory behind the Therapeutic Community? What event in the Chief’s memory shows how the Nurse has perverted this theory? What does the Chief believe is the reason the men do this?
20. Why is McMurphy upset at the meeting? How does Harding try to explain it? What is McMurphy’s explanation? How does Harding change his story?
21. Why does the Nurse have so much power in the hospital?
22. What is Harding’s rabbit and wolf analogy? Is it accurate? What is McMurphy’s response to this analogy?
23. What bet does McMurphy make to the others? In reasoning his bet, what does McMurphy admit about his illness?