

# ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST

## Close Reading Worksheet Two Part I to end

Answer on this sheet. Write notes or sentences as directed by your teacher.

1. After Harding admits that all the patients are under the spell of Big Nurse, quote his comment about Dr. Spivey.
2. Explain Harding's quote "All of us in here are rabbits of varying ages and degrees, hippity-hopping through our Walt Disney World."
3. When does Chief Bromden's fog generally surround him and fill the room?
4. What does McMurphy reveal when he says, "Why, you sure did give a jump when I told you that coon was coming, Chief"?
5. What is the purpose of the "Shock Shop"?
6. Quote Harding's definition of the Electro Shop Therapy machine.
7. How does Chief Broom describe Big Nurse when she is angry?
8. What does Chief Broom mean when he says of Big Nurse, "She's lost a little battle here today, but...in a big war...she'll go on winning"?
9. When McMurphy sits before the blank TV, what does Big Nurse mean when she says, "You're committed you realize"?
10. Quote what Chief Bromden says outsiders would say if they passed by and saw men sitting before a blank screen and a woman ranting and screaming at them.

### Application

You are a social scientist or psychologist. You are writing a clinical report. Express your thoughts and findings about the behavior of McMurphy or Big Nurse in Part I. Predict what will happen to this person.

### Enrichment

1. Choose a scene from Part I which impressed you the most. Portray that scene in ink or water color on art or poster paper.
2. In ink or water color portray Chief Broom sitting in his "fog." In comic-strip fashion above his head, make a drawing of one of his images that appears in his thoughts.

• **TEACHER'S GUIDE**  
**One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest**

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### Biographical Information

Ken Kesey was born in 1935 in La Junta Colorado. His family later moved to Oregon, where Kesey now lives. He attended the University of Oregon and later studied creative writing at Stanford University. During these years, he wrote two other (unpublished) novels before *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. While at Stanford, Kesey volunteered for a series of government drug experiments and also worked as an aide in a mental hospital. Both these experiences were important to his writing of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. During the 1960's Kesey was arrested for drug possession, fled to Mexico, and returned to serve time in prison. His cross-country bus trip with the Merry Pranksters became the subject of Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*.

### Major Works

- *Sometimes a Great Notion* (1964). The Stamper family struggles to preserve its individualism against the economic pressures of a large Northwestern logging company.
- *Kesey's Garage Sale* (1973). This collection features short pieces by Kesey, interviews, and contributions by several of his literary friends.

*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* has been made into both a play and an Academy award winning film. There is also a film version of *Sometimes a Great Notion*. Kesey himself has produced a children's movie, *Atlantis Rising* (1970), as well as co-editing *The Last Supplement to the Whole Earth Catalogue* (1970).

### Chief Characteristics

Kesey's fiction portrays the battle of individuals to preserve their integrity in the face of a system—economic, social, or medical—which seeks to dehumanize them. His main characters are often eccentric, but they are filled with a personal energy that makes them fight conformity and restriction. These heroes (always men) usually possess physical strength and/or a sense of humor that allows them to challenge the impersonal or oppressive authorities that keep those around them in submission. Although the challengers may be defeated, they inspire both the reader and their fellow characters to believe in the value of the individual.

Kesey's major works take place in the rugged Northwest and are full of vivid nature descriptions. Their action includes such classically masculine activities as hunting, fishing, sports, and logging. Although the principles held by Kesey's characters are simple and straightforward ones, the literary form of his novels is complex and sophisticated. Chief Bromden's feigned deafness and his "insanity" make him an ideal viewer of events and a bizarre interpreter of them, while the shifts of viewpoint in *Sometimes a Great Notion* form an even more complicated narrative structure. Much of this effect is lost in the film versions of Kesey's novels, which use more linear narrative structures.

Kesey's novels are also filled with symbolism of the sort traditionally found in the American fable or romance from Hawthorne to the present. Events like the World Series, names (Miss Ratched), and religious overtones (McMurphy as Christ-figure) mingle with phrases from songs and nursery rhymes to make a slightly fantastic world in which the battle between good and evil can be expressed in simple and direct terms.

### Related Reading

- *Wuthering Heights*, by Emily Bronte (1847). One of the greatest tales of romantic individualism, this love story features equally powerful male and female characters.
- *Bless the Beasts and Children*, by Glendon Swarthout (1970). A group of psychologically unhappy adolescents seek to prove themselves by rescuing a doomed buffalo herd.
- *When the Legends Die*, by Hal Borland (1963). A young Indian nearly destroys himself by living too long in the white man's world before he finally returns to his own traditions.

### Postreading Writing Assignment

Write an essay in which you interpret and judge the character of McMurphy. Is he a profane man? Is he a dishonest man? Is he a compassionate man? Is he a sacrificial hero? Is he something else?

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