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Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

*One Flew Over
the Cuckoo's Nest*

by Ken Kesey

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ISBN 10: 1-58049-199-5
ISBN 13: 978-1-58049-199-0
Reorder No. 300809

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

Objectives

By the end of this unit, the student will be able to:

1. point out the significance of the following symbols in the story: the fog, the geese, McMurphy's underwear.
2. recognize the Christian images in the novel and discuss the question of whether or not McMurphy is a Christ-like character.
3. comment on the ways the author uses descriptions of the characters' hands to define personality.
4. define black comedy and cite examples of black comedy in this story.
5. discuss the extent to which the Chief is or is not a reliable narrator.
6. point out how the following words apply to the Chief's hallucinations:
 - combine
 - fog
 - time control.
7. show how McMurphy's presence in the hospital demonstrates the conflicts between the individual's needs and society's needs.
8. by citing comments or incidents from the novel, prove that the following are or are not themes:
 - women have the power to suppress a man's self worth.
 - laughter and comfort with one's sexuality are signs of strength and sanity.
 - people who do not conform to society's rules are sometimes judged to be insane.
 - sometimes rules need to be broken so a person can grow as an individual.
 - strength and courage come from being true to yourself.
9. define the following medical terms from the story: Therapeutic Community, EST, lobotomy, psychopath, Disturbed Ward, acutes, chronics, epilepsy.
10. point out the significance of the author's choice of character names in this story including: Ratched, Big Nurse, Chief Broom, Billy Bibbitt.

11. cite incidents from the story which illustrate the abuses the patients in the story suffer at the hands of the staff.
12. write a character sketch of Nurse Ratched in which you discuss the extent to which she is responsible for the misery the patients on her ward experience.
13. consider the depiction of women in this story and discuss the extent to which the following female characters have redeeming qualities: Candy Starr, Vera Harding Mrs. Bibbit, Mrs. Bromden.
14. identify each of the following minor characters and point out their importance in this story: Cheswick, Sefelt, Billy, the black orderlies.
15. consider all the patients in the hospital and point out the irony of McMurphy's situation.
16. discuss the definition of a hero and whether or not McMurphy is a heroic character.
17. comment on the significance of the title of the novel as it relates to the action in the story.
18. define the vocabulary words as they are used in the story.
19. identify the author's use of foreshadowing, irony, simile, allusion, and flashbacks in the story.
20. point out how the Chief's description of society in terms of a machine reflects his level of sanity.
21. infer about characters and events when the meanings are not explicitly stated.
22. identify Bromden's point of view and how it reemphasizes the atmosphere in the institution.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

Test

Matching

1. The geese the Chief sees outside the hospital window symbolize
 - A. the idea that it is natural for a man to be an individual.
 - B. freedom.
 - C. the Chief's retreat from reality.
 - D. Nurse Ratched's power to control the natural sexuality of the male patients.
2. The description of Harding's hands is significant because
 - A. they give the reader a clue as to his sexual difficulties.
 - B. their large, meaty appearance contrasts with Harding's meek manners.
 - C. they have tobacco stains on the fingers, indicating that Harding is a chain smoker.
 - D. Both A and B
 - E. A, B, and C
3. The fishing trip is good for the men because
 - A. they catch a large swordfish.
 - B. they regain some of their lost courage and learn to laugh again
 - C. the Chief talks for the first time.
 - D. Billy sleeps with Candy.
4. Which of the following statements about McMurphy is unquestionably true?
 - A. McMurphy is a psychopath because he lacks sound judgment and often acts impulsively in criminal or amoral ways.
 - B. McMurphy is at heart a con man who acts only for his own selfish gains.
 - C. McMurphy has lead a tough life with many fights, but his laugh is genuine.
 - D. McMurphy is secretly in love with Nurse Ratched.
5. The orderlies abuse the patients by
 - A. cramming food into the chronics' mouths more quickly than they can swallow it.
 - B. sexually abusing the men with thermometers.
 - C. eating the food that was intended for the patients.
 - D. Both A and B
 - E. A, B, and C

6. Which of the following incidents from the story is an example of irony?
 - A. Vera Harding is a beautiful woman who is comfortable with her sexuality.
 - B. Harding and most of the other acutes are in the hospital voluntarily, while McMurphy is committed to the hospital by a judge.
 - C. The Chief's mother is a white woman.
 - D. Nurse Ratched is friends with Billy Bibbit's mother.

7. Cheswick and Billy both commit suicide because
 - A. once they have tasted what it is like to be strong men, they cannot go back to being "rabbits."
 - B. McMurphy makes Nurse Ratched so mad she takes her anger out on them, and makes their lives miserable.
 - C. they cannot live with the knowledge they are never going to leave the hospital.
 - D. they have had so much EST that they can no longer function as men.

8. Nurse Ratched decides to keep McMurphy on the ward after McMurphy defies her authority when he pretends to watch the world series on TV because
 - A. Dr. Spivey and the other staff members side with McMurphy.
 - B. she is secretly in love with McMurphy and cannot bear to have him removed from the ward.
 - C. she knows if she moves him to Disturbed, he will then become a martyr to the other patients.
 - D. she truly wants what is best for McMurphy, and she thinks she is the best one to help him overcome his mental illness.

9. Which of the following incidents from the story is an example of black comedy?
 - A. When McMurphy first arrives on the ward, he greets everyone including the chronics like they are normal men while skillfully avoiding the orderly with the thermometer.
 - B. McMurphy cheerfully plays monopoly with the men even though Martini is having hallucinations all through the game.
 - C. McMurphy is given a lobotomy because of his violent behavior.
 - D. Both A and B
 - E. A, B and C

10. "Ratched" and "Big Nurse" are appropriate names for the nurse in charge of the ward because
 - A. The Chief thinks anyone who is strong or in authority is also physically large. Therefore, he refers to Nurse Ratched as the "Big Nurse."
 - B. "Ratched" sounds like the tool called a "ratchet." This name is appropriate because Nurse Ratched is a tool used by society to force the mental patients to conform to society's rules.
 - C. Nurse Ratched is a tall, large-busted woman who uses her womanly curves to sexually tease the men.
 - D. Both A and B
 - E. A, B, and C

11. McMurphy stops his battle with Nurse Ratched when
 - A. the Chief tells him about Electric Shock Therapy.
 - B. McMurphy realizes Ratched has enough power to keep him in the hospital indefinitely.
 - C. Cheswick commits suicide.
 - D. the Chief lifts the control panel, winning McMurphy enough money that he does not think he needs to continue the battle.
12. Sefelt refuses to take his seizure medication because
 - A. he does not want to look old.
 - B. it will make his teeth rot.
 - C. the medicine does not work.
 - D. Both A and B
 - E. A, B, and C
13. Which of the following incidents from the novel illustrates the theme that sometimes rules need to be broken so a person can grow as an individual.
 - A. McMurphy takes the boat without the Captain's permission.
 - B. The men play monopoly without strictly adhering to the rules.
 - C. McMurphy sneaks Candy into the ward so she can be with Billy.
 - D. Both A and B
 - E. A, B, and C
14. McMurphy tries to fluster Nurse Ratched with little rebellions like
 - A. writing rude messages in mirror writing and pasting them under the rims of the toilet seats.
 - B. making crude sexual comments to her about the size of her breasts.
 - C. writing nonsense in the log.
 - D. Both A and B
 - E. A, B, and C
15. The Chief first feels deaf and dumb
 - A. while he is in the army.
 - B. as a child on the reservation before it is sold to the government.
 - C. after he gets his first electric shock treatment
 - D. after he sees his father drink himself to death.
16. Which of the following does the Chief believe is an example of the Combine at work?
 - A. The Chief notices that all of the new houses look alike.
 - B. The Chief regains his ability to speak and hear.
 - C. The Indians are beginning to build scaffolding over the dam so they can fish for salmon again.
 - D. The Chief tells the Mexican he is a professional Indian wrestler.

17. The title of this novel
- A. is based on an old children's rhyme.
 - B. is appropriate because in the end the Chief is inspired by McMurphy's courage to escape from the mental hospital.
 - C. is an excerpt from one of the Chief's hallucinations that he is capable of flying like a goose.
 - D. Both A and B
 - E. A, B, and C
18. The Chief kills McMurphy because
- A. he cannot stand to see his only friend suffering from the pain of the operation.
 - B. he knows McMurphy will never be whole again after the lobotomy and is as good as dead. When he kills McMurphy, he is only killing McMurphy's body.
 - C. McMurphy is the only one who knows the Chief can both hear and speak.
 - D. the Chief is angry with McMurphy for letting Nurse Ratched win the final battle.
19. Which of the following quotations from this story is spoken by Nurse Ratched?
- A. "We don't use the room at all otherwise; there's no longer a need for the hydrotherapy it was designed for, now that we have the new drugs."
 - B. "I don't agree that he should be sent up to Disturbed, which would simply be an easy way of passing our problem on to another ward, and I don't agree that he is some kind of extraordinary being - some kind of 'super' psychopath."
 - C. "Oh Dale, you never do have enough, do you."
 - D. "You'll recall McMurphy came in full steam, from a rigorous life outdoors on a work farm, ruddy of face and abloom with physical health."
20. What does McMurphy promise the Chief if the Chief will agree to lift the control panel?
- A. McMurphy promises the Chief he can have sex with Candy.
 - B. McMurphy promises to make the Chief big again.
 - C. McMurphy promises to give the Chief half of the profits from the wagers.
 - D. Both A and B
 - E. A, B, and C

Essays (Answer any two.)

1. Many critics believe Kesey intends McMurphy to be a heroic, Christ-like figure. Do you agree or disagree with this theory? Cite incidents from the story to support your answer.
2. In the beginning of this story, McMurphy is described by the judge as a psychopath. Do you believe McMurphy is truly insane or merely a con man trying to escape the work farm? Cite incidents from the story to support your answer.
3. Some women are offended by this novel because of its apparent lack of decent female characters. In what ways do the following characters exhibit negative qualities? Do they have any redeeming qualities? What do you think Kesey is saying about the level of responsibility women must accept for helping society destroy a man's individuality? Nurse Ratched, Vera Harding, Mrs. Bibbit, Candy Starr, Mrs. Bromden
4. State whether or not you believe the Chief is a reliable narrator for this story. Why do you think Kesey chose to tell this story in part from the Chief's point of view? Cite incidents from the novel to support your answer.

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Test Answer Key

1. B	6. B	11. B	16. A
2. A	7. A	12. D	17. D
3. B	8. C	13. E	18. B
4. C	9. D	14. E	19. B
5. E	10. D	15. B	20. B

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Terms and Definitions

Flashback - a scene that interrupts the ongoing action in a story to show an event that happened earlier.

Foreshadowing – the use of hints or clues in a story to suggest what action is to come. Foreshadowing is frequently used to create interest and build suspense.

Symbol - an object, person, or place that has a meaning in itself and that also stands for something larger than itself, usually an idea or concept; some concrete thing which represents an abstraction. Example: The sea could be symbolic for “the unknown,” since the sea is something which is physical and can be seen by the reader, but has elements which can not be understood, it can be used *symbolically* to stand for the abstraction of “mystery,” “obscurity,” or “the unknown.”

Theme - The central or dominant idea behind the story; the most important aspect that emerges from how the book treats its subject. Sometimes theme is easy to see, but, at other times, it may be more difficult. Theme is usually expressed indirectly, as an element the reader must figure out. It is a universal statement about humanity, rather than a simple statement dealing with plot or characters in the story. Themes are generally hinted at through different devices: a phrase or quotation that introduces the novel, a recurring element in the book, or an observation made that is reinforced through plot, dialogue, or characters. It must be emphasized that not all works of literature have themes in them.

In a story about a man who is diagnosed with cancer and, through medicine and will-power, returns to his former occupation, the theme might be: “real courage is demonstrated through internal bravery and perseverance.” In a poem about a flower that grows, blooms, and dies, the theme might be: “youth fades and death comes to all.”

Reliable and Unreliable narrator - Reliable narrators are those whose accounts we trust, whereas unreliable narrators may be sick, ill-informed, deliberately or innocently misleading, or incapable of understanding what is happening. Most third-person narrators are trustworthy, but first-person narration is frequently unreliable, due to the narrator's closeness to the story. Examples: Anne Frank, even though she is a first-person narrator, tells her story in an accurate manner; what she says can be believed. Chief Bromden, the narrator of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, is delusional; therefore, the reader must question whether what he says is true.

Irony - a subtle, sometimes humorous perception of inconsistency in which the significance of a statement or event is changed by its content. For example: the firehouse burned down.

- *Dramatic irony* - the audience knows more about a character's situation than the character does, foreseeing an outcome contrary from the character's expectations. The character's statements have one meaning for the character and a different meaning to the reader, who knows more than the character.
- *Structural irony* - a naïve hero whose view of the world differs from the author's and reader's. Structural irony flatters the reader's intelligence at the expense of the hero.
- *Verbal irony* - a discrepancy between what is said and what is really meant; sarcasm. Example: calling a stupid man smart.

Point of View - the position or vantage point from which the events of a story seem to come and are presented to the reader. The author determines the point of view. The two most common are First-person and Third-person. Example: In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the reader receives all the information from Huck's vantage point, which is an example of a first-person point of view; the only things that are known come through him.

Black humor - grotesque subjects like death, disease, war, insanity, etc., are presented humorously, in order to point out their absurdity. Example: Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*.

Hero – the central character, usually one who possesses noble qualities such as self-sacrifice, courage, wisdom, etc. Examples: Tarzan, Frodo, Jesus.

Motif - a situation, incident, idea, or image that is found and repeated significantly in a novel. Example: In *Hamlet*, revenge is a frequently repeated idea.

Allusion - a reference to a person, place, poem, book, or movie outside of the story that the author expects the reader will recognize.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

Notes

The overall theme of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is that of a man's right to be an individual versus society's need to make him conform. This theme is reflective of the social climate of the 1960's. Some of the language and content in this novel may be offensive to minorities and women. It is important to remind the students that in 1962, when this story was written, the civil rights movement and the women's movement were in their infancy. Other themes also are in evidence throughout the novel: what is sanity, how does authority cripple people, is the natural man better off free, and can the simple force of one's personality overcome the repression of society.

While the story is rooted in the ideals and cultures of the 1960's, many of the concerns are as relevant today as they were then.

*Note – Page numbers refer to the Signet edition of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, copyright 1962.

Brief Biography of Ken Kesey

The 1960's was a decade of social rebellion including the Civil Rights Movement, the beginnings of the women's movement, and the protest against the Vietnam war. Many people sought their individuality through free love, drug experimentation, or through organized rebellions such as sit-ins. After attending the University of Oregon and Stanford, Kesey joined this rebellious generation by volunteering for drug experiments at a mental hospital. He used these experiences as the basis for his first novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, published in 1962. Later, Kesey traveled the country in a wildly painted bus, taking drugs, and rebelling against authority. He spent five months in prison for possession of marijuana before returning to his farm in Oregon.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Define Combine, the fog, and time control. Why does the Chief describe the hospital as a large machine?
2. Some qualities of heroes are courage, self-confidence, and a willingness to sacrifice themselves for others. Cite incidents from the story proving McMurphy has these qualities.
3. In what ways do the men change on the fishing trip? What change does the Chief observe in McMurphy on the way back to the hospital?
4. Find three examples of Christ-like images in this story. Speculate on whether or not McMurphy is intended to be a Christ-like character.
5. Why is Harding a patient at the hospital?
6. For what reasons do you think Kesey chose to tell this story from the Chief's point of view?
7. Define black comedy. Cite three examples of black comedy in this story.
8. Research the state of mental hospitals today. Do they still use EST, lobotomy, and the Therapeutic Community as ways to treat the mentally ill? If not, what therapies do they use instead? Are there instances of patient abuse in today's institutions? Are epileptics placed in mental institutions? How is their disease treated today?
9. Describe McMurphy from Nurse Ratched's point of view.
10. Why do McMurphy and the Chief believe Nurse Ratched is not totally responsible for the misery the men on her ward suffer?
11. Compare Candy Starr and Vera Harding. Why does McMurphy seem to like each of these women?
12. Compare Mrs. Bibbit and Mrs. Bromden. What is the Chief's opinion of these women? How do they hurt the men in their lives?
13. Why do Cheswick and Billy commit suicide?

14. Discuss the significance of the title of this novel and what geese may symbolize in this story.
15. What is the importance of laughter in this novel?
16. Comment on the ending to this story. How does it tie in with the overall theme - a man's right to be an individual versus society's need to make him conform?
17. Why would many people be offended by Kesey's black and female characters? Cite incidents from the story to support your answer.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

Vocabulary

Psychopath - person with a mental disorder, characterized by emotional instability, lack of sound judgment, impulsive, often criminal or amoral behavior, and lack of a functioning conscience.

Combine - a union or combination of individuals for a common purpose; a type of threshing machine.

Matriarchy - a society in which the mother is the head of the family; a government by women.

Oppression - a feeling of being weighed down, as with worries or problems; physical or mental distress; the subjugation of a person or group of people through unjust power.

Capitalism - the economic system in which all or most of the production and distribution of goods and property is privately owned and operated for profit.

Epilepsy - a chronic disease of the nervous system which results in convulsions and often unconsciousness

Electro Shock Therapy (EST) - a method of treating certain psychotic conditions by applying electric current to the brain; infrequently used today

Lobotomy - a surgical operation in which the front lobe of the brain is cut to treat certain psychoses; considered unnecessary today

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

Study Guide Teacher's Copy

Note: There are no numbered chapters in this book, but each of the four parts is broken down into scenes. For clarity in this Unit, the first few words of each scene are used as the heading.

PART 1

They're out there.

1. Why do the black hospital workers not "...bother not talking out loud about their hate secrets when." the Chief is around? (Pg. 10) In what ways does being half-Indian help the Chief?

The orderlies believe the Chief is both deaf and dumb. The Chief's Indian heritage helps him to be clever enough to fool everyone into believing he is deaf.

2. What does the following description of Nurse Ratched suggest to the reader about her character?

"A mistake was made somehow in manufacturing, putting those big, womanly breasts on what would of otherwise been a perfect work, and you can see how bitter she is about it." (Pg. 11)

Answers may vary.

Example: Chief Bromden views the hospital and society in general as a machine. Nurse Ratched is part of that machine in every way. She is a woman who strives for the cold perfection of a machine, and is frustrated because she cannot achieve it. Bromden, as an unreliable narrator, imposes his values and opinions on the reader. There is no evidence that Ratched is upset by her bosom. Because the chief fixates upon machinery, he believes Ratched was made with too-large breasts and hates them.

Use the following passage from this section to answer the next three questions:

“(A blue tick hound bays out there in the fog, running scared and lost because he can’t see. No tracks on the ground but the ones he’s making, and he sniffs in every direction with his cold red-rubber nose and picks up no scent but his own fear, fear burning down into him like steam.) It’s gonna burn me just that way, finally telling about all this, about the hospital, and her, and the guys - and about McMurphy...this is too awful to be the truth!...But it’s the truth even if it didn’t happen.” (Pg. 13)

3. What relationship is the author suggesting between the blue tick hound and Chief Bromden?

Answers will vary.

Example: Both the Chief and the dog are scared and lost. The dog is unable to see in the fog and the Chief, especially when he is afraid, feels his own fog closing in.

4. Speculate on the significance of the fog in this story. What do you think it may symbolize? How do flashbacks of the Chief’s childhood help him find his way out of the fog?

Answers will vary.

Example: The fog is a symbol of the Chief’s fear. Whenever the Chief sees the fog, he is afraid and often retreats into his childhood. Memories of his childhood help him to escape the fear by giving the Chief somewhere safe to hide. Fog is amorphous; it penetrates everywhere. It is a perfect image for Bromden’s fear.

5. In what ways is this passage an example of foreshadowing? How does point of view factor into the story?

The quote hints that the Chief is afraid to tell the story but is going to anyway. The reader must assume that, while the Chief is the narrator, he relates the incidents as a nearly sane man, after his escape from the institution. The point of view is quite complicated: a normal man telling what he previously observed when nearly insane allows the reader a great deal of leeway to determine the validity of what happens, yet also adds a great deal of confusion to the events’ accuracy. The foreshadowing of “and about McMurphy” leads to suspense as to his identity.

When the fog clears to where I can see, I'm sitting in the day room.

1. How does the Chief know the new Admission is “no ordinary Admission”?

The new man is not weak or scared. He strides into the room, instead of sliding scared along the walls and does not submit when the orderlies want to give him a shower.

2. What evidence is there in this section of patient abuse?

The orderlies eat the Chief's breakfast; the Chief believes they do things to him when he is unconscious; the orderlies delight in torturing new Admissions with the thermometer; the mattress in the Seclusion room is filthy.

3. Briefly describe R. P. McMurphy. What does the description of McMurphy's hands suggest to the reader about his character? Why is the Chief impressed with McMurphy's laugh?

McMurphy is redheaded, with a broad face and chest, a big grin and a scar from his nose to one cheekbone. His hands are big and beat up, suggesting that McMurphy has lead a rough life with many fistfights. The Chief is impressed with McMurphy's laugh because it is genuine. The Chief cannot remember when he has last heard a real laugh.

4. Define “psychopath.” Why is McMurphy in the hospital?

Psychopath - person with a mental disorder, characterized by emotional instability, lack of sound judgment, impulsive, often criminal or amoral behavior, and lack of a functioning conscience. McMurphy is committed to the hospital by the court because of his fighting at the work farm. The court thinks he is a psychopath. McMurphy, however, claims that he desired to get out of a prison work detail so that he would get committed to the hospital in order to “trim you babies [out of money] like little lambs.”(Pg. 17)

The new man stands looking a minute, to get the set-up of the day room.

1. Briefly identify Ellis and Ruckly. Why do you think the author includes so many details about these two minor characters?

Ellis was an Acute who was given too much shock therapy and is now a Chronic. He stands against the wall with his arms in a Christ-like pose. Ruckly is also a Chronic who used to be an Acute. He was given a lobotomy to make him more docile. The operation was a failure, and all he can do now is hold a picture in his hands all day long.

Answers may vary.

Example: Both of these men serve as proof that the hospital can be a dangerous place for the patients. The author is hinting at the possibility that McMurphy may be in danger of being turned into a Chronic if he does not conform. The description also enhances the Chief's belief in machines, combines, and the horror that occurs in the ward. The Chronics who used to be Acutes are called "culls"; the word emphasizes McMurphy's danger.

2. Describe Harding. Why do you think Billy identifies Harding as the "bull goose loony"? What do Harding's hands reveal about his character?

Harding is a thin, nervous, feminine-looking man. His hands are dainty, long, and white like those of a woman. Harding is a college graduate and is the head of the patient's council.

Answers will vary.

Example: The description of his hands suggests to the reader that he is weak and ineffectual. They flutter like birds when he speaks.

3. What new information is revealed about Chief Bromden when McMurphy asks Billy Bibbit about him?

The Chief is six-foot-seven inches tall. He is a half Columbia Indian. His father was a tribal leader.

4. What pieces of information are revealed near the end of the section? (Pgs. 27-28)

McMurphy suspects Bromden's deafness and muteness is an act. Bromden receives a tiny bit of McMurphy's power through the handshake. McMurphy is not going to back down and obey the rules simply because Ratched wants him to.

In the glass Station the Big Nurse has opened a package...

1. What is the dictionary definition of the noun “Combine”? What is the Chief’s definition?

Combine - a union or combination of individuals for a common purpose; a type of threshing machine.

The Chief describes the Combine as Nurse Ratched and others like her who try to control the world both inside and outside the mental hospital. “Combine” is an especially accurate word, sine it means to unify and to harvest; to make things which are different the same, and to cut down and gather together.

2. Nurse Ratched maintains control of her ward by hand-picking the doctor and the orderlies. Briefly describe the doctor, three black orderlies, and why she thinks they qualify for their jobs.

The doctor is a little man who has trouble keeping his glasses on. He is selected because he is weak and will follow her directions concerning the ward. The first black orderly hates white men because he saw them rape his mother. The next two orderlies are both very black skinned and tall, with bony faces. The chief feels they are perfect for the ward because they hate. It is difficult, however, to know for certain if Bromden’s knowledge of the orderlies’ past is accurate or simply his paranoia.

3. Find a passage on page 32 that illustrates the recurring motif in this novel that Bromden feels the hospital is like a machine.

Answers will vary.

Example: “One by one they are able to disconnect the direct wires and operate on beams.”

4. Find an example of irony on page 36.

Catheters are attached to some patients, marked “DISPOSABLE NOT TO BE RE-USED,” but Bromden’s job is to clean them each day so they can be used the next day.

5. What happens to Mr. Taber under Nurse Ratched’s care? Why do you think the author includes this information about Mr. Taber at this point in the story?

Mr. Taber does not want to cooperate with Nurse Ratched. First, he is captured by the orderlies so Nurse Ratched can force his medication into him like a suppository. It is implied that the orderlies then sexually abuse him. Finally, he is taken away to the other building where they perform electric shock treatments and lobotomies. When he returns, his eyes are bruised, indicating he has had a lobotomy. He is then released into the world as a “cured” man.

Taber is like McMurphy in that neither fit into Nurse Ratched's world. Taber's story is included to keep the reader's interest in McMurphy's story, as well as to reinforce the horrors of the ward.

Before noon time they're at the fog machine...

1. Find a simile on page 42.

"It cracks sharp at the joints with a sound like a frozen canvas is being folded." Note that the nurse's uniform is described as frozen, another indication of the lack of humanity in the ward.

2. Review the definition of a psychopath from the first section in Part I. What evidence is there in McMurphy's record that supports the diagnosis that he is a psychopath?

McMurphy's record shows that he is a man who is constantly in trouble with the law. He admits enjoying gambling and drinking. McMurphy is an accused rapist, who openly admits he has had many sexual partners. He clearly has trouble living within the boundaries of society.

3. What is the theory of the Therapeutic Community? Cite incidents from the story to support or refute the following statement: Nurse Ratched's ward follows the principles of a Therapeutic Community.

The theory of the Therapeutic Community states the ward of the hospital is like a small model of the real world. The inmates must learn to get along in a group. The rules they all must follow are determined by voting in the democratic way. They must air any grievances and feel at ease in their surroundings. They are to feel free to discuss emotional problems in front of patients and staff.

Answers will vary.

Example: On the surface, the ward follows the principles of a Therapeutic Community. The patients do vote on issues and do discuss their feelings in group meetings. However, the ward is not democratic. Nurse Ratched controls Dr. Spivey, the orderlies, and every aspect of the patients' lives. She directs the discussions to belittle the patients in the name of therapy. Nurse Ratched baits the patients and also encourages patients to write down observations about each other in the daily log book.

4. What is the double meaning of Pete Bancini's comment, "I'm tired"?

The patients are rushing headlong into Ratched's control trap, emasculating each other, trying to confess more and more. Bancini, damaged at birth, could not be molded by the Combine. His comments signify that he is tired of hearing and seeing the inmates torture each other, as well as being physically tired.

5. Harding has been humiliated by the others concerning his wife and her affairs. How does McMurphy describe what happened at the group meeting?

McMurphy analogizes it to a "pecking party," in which chickens kill one another in a frenzy. He also claims Big Nurse is the instigator.

6. What is Harding's reaction?

At first, he denies its veracity and defends Ratched completely. But as he become more agitated, he realizes how she has mistreated the patients.

7. Define "matriarchy." Some critics of this book believe Kesey is accusing women of trying to run the world and emasculate the males of the world. Cite incidents from the story which support this idea.

Matriarchy - a society in which the mother is the head of the family; a government by women.

Answers will vary.

Example: Nurse Ratched is friends with the superintendent of the hospital, who is also a woman. They control the hiring and the firing of the staff, including the doctor. Harding's problems stem from his relationship with his wife, and Billy's come from his mother.

8. List the punishments in order of severity that await any patient who refuses to answer Nurse Ratched's questions.

The patient will first be listed as "potential assaultive," sent to the Disturbed ward, then given Shock Therapy, and finally given a lobotomy.

9. "You are strapped to a table, shaped, ironically, like a cross, with a crown of electric sparks in place of thorns. You are touched on each side of the head with wires." (Pgs. 64-65)

Why do you think the punishment for disrupting the routine of the ward is described using Christ-like images? Speculate on what the author may be implying about McMurphy's fate if he continues to disrupt Nurse Ratched's ward.

Answers will vary.

Example: Christ sacrificed His life for mankind. His punishment for standing by His beliefs was death. If McMurphy continues to defy Nurse Ratched, he may also be forced to sacrifice himself for his beliefs.

10. State a theme for this novel based on the following passage from the novel.

“I haven’t heard a real laugh since I came through that door, do you know that? Man, when you lose your laugh you lose your *footing*. A man go around lettin’ a woman whup him down till he can’t laugh any more, and he loses one of the biggest edges he’s got on his side.” (Pg. 65-66)

Answers will vary.

Example: Laughter is a sign of strength and sanity. McMurphy is, according to most definitions, sane. The ward (the world) is insane.

11. What bet does McMurphy make with the other inmates? Why does he think he is “safe” in making this bet?

McMurphy bets the other inmates that he can control his temper better than Nurse Ratched. He is going to try and make her lose control while maintaining his temper. He thinks he is safe in doing this because Harding tells him Nurse Ratched cannot punish anyone for insinuation. McMurphy will be safe as long as he keeps from losing his temper.

One Christmas at midnight...

1. “When nothing else is going on, you usually got the fog or the time control to contend with, but today something’s happened: there hasn’t been any of these things worked on us all day.” (Pgs. 71-72)

What is the “time control”? What is different in the ward so that the Chief does not experience the fog or the time control?

The Chief believes Nurse Ratched has the power to speed up time when the patients are having a good time or slow down time when the patients are bored. The Chief does not experience the fog or the time control because McMurphy is keeping them all entertained. He is keeping the Chief from retreating into the fog by playing cards.

2. Describe McMurphy's underwear. What do you think they symbolize in this story? Explain the significance of the "aces and eights" tattoo.

McMurphy's underpants are black satin with big white whales with red eyes.

Answers will vary.

Example: They could symbolize McMurphy's individuality, his drunken nature, his sexuality, or Ahab's pursuit of Moby Dick to his death. The poker hand of two aces and two eights is referred to metaphorically as a "dead man's hand." This is another case of foreshadowing McMurphy's fate.

3. How does McMurphy discover that Chief Bromden is only pretending to be deaf and dumb? Since McMurphy discovers the Chief's secret so quickly, what conclusions can be made about the level of care in this hospital?

The Chief does not get his usual sleeping pill because McMurphy scares the night nurse so that she stops giving out medications. When the Chief sees McMurphy's underwear and his tattoos, the Chief is so interested, he forgets to get into bed. McMurphy warns him that the night orderly is coming and the Chief shows McMurphy that he can hear by reacting to McMurphy's warning and jumping into bed.

Answers will vary.

Example: The mental hospital is not interested in curing anyone. The Chief does not make trouble, so no one is interested enough in him to notice that he can hear.

First time for a long, long time...

Use the following quotation from this section to answer the next two questions:

"...somebody'll drag me out of the fog and we'll be back on the ward and there won't be a sign of what went on tonight and if I was fool enough to try and tell anybody about it they'd say, Idiot, you just had a nightmare; things as crazy as a big machine room down in the bowels of a dam where people get cut up by robot workers don't exist.

But if they don't exist, how can a man see them?" (Pg. 82)

1. One of the overall themes of this novel is the confusion about who is sane and who is insane. What does this passage tell the reader about the Chief's sanity?

Answers will vary.

Example: The Chief is insane in that he sees things that are not there. However, he is also able to understand the way the oppressive nature of the ward and society erodes a man's masculinity by making him conform and lose his individuality.

2. State a theme for this novel based on the confusion between sanity and insanity.

Answers will vary.

Example: People who do not conform to the rules are sometimes diagnosed as insane, but if conformity is the measure of sanity, many people would be incorrectly diagnosed as insane.

3. Find the ironic statement at the end of the section.

Blastic has died and, in death, is treated “more careful” than at any time in his life.

Come morning, McMurphy is up...

1. McMurphy brushes his teeth with soap powder and the Chief remembers his father talking to government officials on the reservation. What do these two incidents have in common? In what way is the Chief like his father?

Answers will vary.

Example: The Chief is reminded of his father when McMurphy makes a fool of the aide by brushing his teeth with soap powder. McMurphy thinks the idea of locking away the toothpaste is stupid and he makes the aide feel stupid for enforcing that policy. The Chief's father makes the government officials feel stupid by talking about seeing geese in July.

The Chief pretends to be deaf and dumb and his father lets the government officials talk to him like he is ignorant.

2. Find a definition of “oppression,” as it might be used to describe mental patients. In what way can Nurse Ratched’s behavior toward the other inmates be considered oppressive?

oppression - a feeling of being weighed down, as with worries or problems; physical or mental distress

Nurse Ratched says good morning to the patients and also reminds them of their flaws. For example: She says good morning to Mr. Harding and reminds him of his chewed fingernails. She will not allow them any shred of humanity, and if she sees any of them approaching normalcy, she is quick to make him revert to his status as a weak patient.

3. Why do you think the Chief believes Nurse Ratched would rather McMurphy had “been stark naked under that towel than had on those shorts”? (Pg. 90)

Answers will vary.

Example: McMurphy's shorts are a symbol of his earthy, free nature. Nurse Ratched wants him to conform to her rules, so she would rather see him naked than to see him flaunting his individuality. A naked man would be more helpless than one wearing any clothes at all. Additionally, Ratched wants all the patients to dress exactly alike.

4. Find a passage in this section, other than the one describing his shorts, that compares McMurphy to the freedom available in nature.

“the man smell of dust and dirt from the open fields, and sweat, and work.” (Pg. 91)

All through breakfast...

1. Cite an incident at breakfast where McMurphy seems to be following the rules, but is really poking fun at them.

Answers will vary.

Example: McMurphy shoots a butter pad at the clock after he is told he must remain in the breakfast room until 7:30 even though everyone is finished with their meal.

2. What “little battle” does McMurphy win against Nurse Ratched?

McMurphy manages to convince Dr. Spivey to let the acutes use the tub room so they can escape the piped-in music.

3. Why do you think the Chief experiences a return of the “fog” at the end of this section?

The Chief realizes the Big Nurse has all of the power. Even though McMurphy is winning small battles with her, she will win in the end. The hopelessness of trying to fight the Combine triggers the Chief's fog.

There's a Monopoly game...

1. In this scene, McMurphy and the other acutes are playing a confusing monopoly game. Speculate on how the game might have been played if Nurse Ratched were running the game instead of McMurphy.

Answers will vary.

Nurse Ratched would insist on strictly following the rules, unlike McMurphy, who allows the men to generally ignore the rules. She would humiliate Martini for having hallucinations and manage to make all of the players feel bad about themselves, thus removing all of the fun from the game.

There's long spells...

1. McMurphy manages to hold his temper when faced with Nurse Ratched, the aides, and their infantile rules. What happens to finally make McMurphy lose control?

McMurphy is angry at the patients because they refuse to even vote and back him up when he wants to change the times the TV is turned on so he can watch the World Series.

2. Briefly outline McMurphy's way to escape from the hospital. What bet does he make with the men? Despite McMurphy's inability to move the panel, why does he believe he still walks away the "winner"? How is this a type of climax for the first portion of the book?

McMurphy thinks that he can escape through a window in the tub room if he can move a large, heavy panel under the window. He bets the other acutes that he is strong enough to lift it. He cannot, but the others root for him to have the strength, even if it means losing their own bets. The men for the first time show some unity. The main climax for part one, the World Series, is yet to come.

Answers will vary.

Example: McMurphy loses the bet because he is not strong enough to lift the panel, but he thinks he is a winner because at least he had the courage to try.

A visiting doctor... It's getting hard...There's a shipment...

1. Use the three incidents in these sections to prove or disprove the following statement: The Chief is beginning to understand that being "safe" is the cowardly way to live.

Answers will vary.

Example: The picture of the mountains, streams, and fisherman would be a safe way to enjoy fishing, but is it cold and unreal. The Chief retreats to the fog to feel safe, but McMurphy is helping him to see that is cowardly. The Chief cannot understand why Old Rawler went to the trouble to kill himself when the safe thing to do would be just to wait for death. Due to McMurphy's influence, Bromden is beginning to look at his life in the hospital in a different way. He is able to understand that by striving to be safe from society, from their own fears and inadequacies, and, especially, from Big Nurse's techniques, he and the other patients are behaving cowardly.

I know how...

1. What is the actual source of Bromden's fog?

When the chief was in the military, "if the generals had something they wanted to pull...they fogged the field." (Pg. 116) When the ward first began to fog up, he would always find himself in line, waiting for another EST.

2. What are Billy's problems?

Billy stutters, he has attempted suicide in the past, and he has problems with his mother.

3. The Chief is close to succumbing to the power of the fog. What happens to pull him back to reality?

McMurphy is able to pull him out of the fog by trying once again to get permission to watch the World Series on TV. McMurphy needs one more vote to win the decision. He asks one Chronic after another until he finally asks the Chief to raise his hand. The Chief does not want to leave the fog, but his hand goes up anyway giving McMurphy the majority he needs to win. "McMurphy did something to it that first day [the Chief's hand]...McMurphy's got hidden wires hooked to it...No. That's not the truth. I lifted it myself." (Pg. 126)

4. In the battle between Nurse Ratched and McMurphy, who do you think is the winner at the end of Part One? For what reason can this scene be called a turning point in the story.

Answers will vary.

Example: This scene is a turning point because the Chief makes the decision to leave the fog. Despite the fact that Nurse Ratched has the power to manipulate the rules in her favor, McMurphy is the clear winner of the confrontation because he wins the support of the other inmates.

5. Find the irony in the last paragraph of part one.

It is ironic that the Chief says a visitor to the mental institution would have felt the men yelling at a blank TV screen were crazy not only because, obviously, they are in the institution, but also because this rebellion is the first sign of sanity they have shown.

Questions covering all of Part 1

1. Critics refer to some scenes in this section as “black humor.” They deal with disturbing subjects like death with bitter humor. Cite three examples of black comedy in Part 1.

Answers will vary.

Example: One example is when McMurphy greets the chronics just like they are normal men. They are clearly very damaged, but the scene is funny. The monopoly game is humorous, but it is also clear that the men are very ill. Martini keeps having hallucinations. The way McMurphy eludes the orderly with the thermometer is funny, but the orderly’s habit of abusing new patients with the thermometer is a very serious subject. The entire concept of mental institutions is, on the surface, not humorous, but a character like McMurphy, in Kesey’s hands, points out the absurdity of the system.

2. Discuss the importance of names in this novel: Ratched, Big Nurse, Chief Broom, Billy Bibbitt.

Answers will vary.

Example: “Ratched” sounds like a ratchet, which is a tool. She is a tool used by society to suppress the individual so that he conforms to the will of the majority. She can “ratched up” the intensity, the noise, even the time on the ward. Her name also is a pun on “rat shit” and “wretched,” which hints at her personality. The Chief is called “Chief Broom” because he sweeps the floors all day long and Broom sounds like his real name, Bromden. The Chief calls Nurse Ratched the “Big Nurse” because he thinks anyone with power is also physically large; despite his own 6’8” size, he feels small and weak. Billy Bibbitt’s name would seem to echo the difficulties he has in speaking; the name itself is a stutter.

3. Cite incidents from the story to support or refute the following statement: The women in this story are being blamed for the illnesses many of the men suffer.

Answers will vary.

Example: Nurse Ratched continually reminds the men of their weaknesses. Billy's problems stem from his relationship with his mother. Harding has trouble feeling like a man around his wife.

4. Cite incidents from the story to support or refute the following statement: Laughter and sex are necessary for a man to live a sane and happy life.

Answers will vary.

Example: Laughter was unheard of in the hospital before McMurphy arrived. He is also a man who enjoys sex and flaunts his masculinity in front of Nurse Ratched and the other patients. These qualities remind the Chief of his father. McMurphy's male, laughing presence helps to pull Bromden out of the fog.

5. This novel was written in the 1960's, a time where individuals believed that sometimes rules needed to be broken so that the individual can grow. Discuss the rules in the hospital and how they may be inhibiting the patient's road to sanity.

Answers will vary.

Examples:

- *Encouraging the men to reveal each other's secrets*
- *Treating the men with medication and EST, rather than with psychiatry*
- *Ratched having the ultimate power.*

PART 2

Just at the edge...

1. How does the Chief get the "...full force of the dangers we let ourselves in for when we let McMurphy lure us out of the fog"? (Pg. 130)

The fog makes the Chief feel safe. When the Big Nurse loses control, the Chief no longer sees the fog; however, there are dangers for him. He is worried the orderlies know that he can hear and has heard all the ward's secrets over the years .

2. What does Alvin say that causes the other staff members to "...glare at him like he's said some awful vulgar thing"? (Pg. 133) Why do they turn on him? In what way is this meeting similar to the group therapy meetings Nurse Ratched has with the patients?

Alvin suggests that McMurphy is really a con man and not mentally ill at all. The other staff members turn on him because they want to please Nurse Ratched. It does not matter that Alvin is one of their own, they cut him to ribbons in the hope of pleasing her. During the patient therapy meetings, the patients turn on each other in the same way while trying to please Nurse Ratched.

3. What does the discussion about McMurphy's diagnosis tell the reader about the possible abuses in mental hospitals?

The staff suggests several psychiatric labels for McMurphy's mental illness. There is no real attempt to properly diagnose him. In fact, they reject any possibility that he may be sane. The author is suggesting that the quality of care in mental institutions is very poor, and the patients may be misdiagnosed.

4. "No. He isn't extraordinary. He is simply a man and no more, and is subject to all the fears and all the cowardice and all the timidity that any other man is subject to. Given a few more days, I have a very strong feeling that he will prove this, to us as well as the rest of the patients." (Pg. 136)

What does the above quotation reveal about Nurse Ratched's motivations for keeping McMurphy on her floor instead of transferring him to the Disturbed ward?

Nurse Ratched wants to break McMurphy's spirit in front of the other patients. It is no longer enough to simply remove McMurphy from her floor. She must publicly conquer him so she can regain her position of absolute authority over the other patients. She sees McMurphy as a direct threat to her power and influence.

5. Find a passage in this section that lets the reader know Nurse Ratched has enough power to conquer McMurphy.

Answers will vary.

Example: "We have weeks, or months, or even years if need be. Keep in mind that Mr. McMurphy is committed. The length of time he spends in this hospital is entirely up to us." (Pg. 137)

6. What is significant about the word "committed"?

The implication is that the rest of the Acute patients are not committed; McMurphy is there until Big Nurse decides to release him.

The way the Big Nurse acted

1. Why does the Chief think McMurphy is strong enough to battle Nurse Ratched? What is it about his character that gives him this strength?

McMurphy is being himself. He is not trying to please other people or conform to their ideas of how he should behave. The Chief believes McMurphy is strong because "he's what he is..." (Pg. 140)

2. The Chief observes a dog watching geese and sniffing for squirrels. It will probably be hit by an oncoming car. What does this extended metaphor represent?

Answers will vary.

Example: The dog is like McMurphy: carefree, being himself, investigating interesting things. The car is like Nurse Ratched it has the power to stop the dog, just as Ratched really has power over McMurphy. The dog gets distracted by the geese flying overhead, probably by their freedom, and watches them silently. He goes off after them, "steady and solemn like he had an appointment." (Pg. 143) This is another case of foreshadowing McMurphy's eventual fate.

In the group meetings...

1. What significant understanding does McMurphy have in the pool? How does it affect Bromden?

He learns that being “committed” on the ward is not like the prison sentence he had; there is no release date. Ratched is jailer, warden, and judge, all in one. Bromden says, “I began to feel afraid” and “I could see it coming.” (Pg. 149)

2. Compare the group meeting at the beginning of this section when they are discussing cigarettes, with the group meeting at the end of this section. How has McMurphy's attitude changed?

In the first meeting McMurphy and Cheswick work together against Nurse Ratched's decision to confiscate the patients' cigarettes. In the second meeting, Cheswick is continuing the fight, but McMurphy backs down. McMurphy knows that Nurse Ratched has the power to keep him locked up indefinitely, so he behaves himself.

3. What impact does this have on Cheswick? Point out another case of the “unreliable narrator.”

Cheswick is furious because he has lost McMurphy's support and is removed to the Disturbed ward. Eventually, even Cheswick comes to understand why McMurphy backs down. Cheswick drowns in the pool in a suicide. Bromden says that Cheswick “got his fingers stuck some way in the grate” and drowned. (Pg. 151) The “some way” indicates that the Chief cannot say for sure, but the reader knows that Cheswick killed himself.

4. Why is the Chief afraid of the pool?

The Chief roamed the waterfalls on the reservation as a child. He became afraid when his father started “getting scared of things,” a reference to his father's decision to sell the reservation because Papa knew he could not hold out against the pressures of the outside world. (Pg. 147)

Up ahead of me...

1. Why does Sefelt refuse to take his anti-seizure medication?

The medication works to reduce his epileptic seizures, but it also rots his gums and makes his teeth fall out. Sefelt is worried about looking old if his teeth fall out.

2. Why do you think the last sentence in this section compares McMurphy's face to Sefelt's face after his seizure? "His face has commenced to take on that same haggard, puzzled look of pressure that the face on the floor has." (Pg. 155)

Answers will vary.

Example: Sefelt is in a no-win situation. He needs the medication, but the medication has side effects. McMurphy cannot win, either. If he defies Nurse Ratched's rules she will keep him in the hospital. However, if he complies with her rules he will no longer be himself. He will lose the strength of character that makes him an individual, so Nurse Ratched is victorious either way.

Whatever it was...

1. What does this short scene tell the reader about the impact McMurphy's compliance to Nurse Ratched's rules is having on the Chief?

Bromden is again describing the hospital in terms of machinery. He is slipping back into his hallucination that the world is a large combine.

They take me with the Acutes...

1. Briefly describe Vera Harding. Do you agree or disagree with Harding's contention that his wife is responsible for his problems?

Answers will vary.

Example: Vera Harding is a tall, well-dressed, sexy woman. She is uncomplicated and comfortable with herself. Harding is nervous around her. He tries to demean her for not using proper grammar and seems intimidated by her sexuality. Vera and McMurphy are alike in that they are both comfortable in their sexuality and both have strong confident personalities. Harding is the one with the problems, not his wife; however, Vera contributes to his feelings of inadequacies by her flirting, her comments and her obvious desire for McMurphy.

2. What does McMurphy get angry about? How does he show that his situation is bothering him greatly?

He wants the rest of the Acutes, including Harding, to stop looking up to him and to “quit bugging” him. His confidence is weakened, as shown by his inability to shuffle the cards.

I remember it was a Friday...

1. State a theme for this story based on the following conversation between McMurphy and Harding about electric shock therapy.

“If they were going to knock a man in the head, they needed to use something surer and more accurate than a hammer; they finally settled on electricity.”

“Jesus, didn’t they think it might do some damage? Didn’t the public raise Cain about it?”

“I don’t think you fully understand the public, my friend; in this country, when something is out of order, then the quickest way to get it fixed is the best way.” (Pg. 164)

Answers will vary.

Examples: Society will enforce its rules even at the cost of an individual’s health. The quickest way to fix something broken is the best way, regardless of the side effects or consequences.

2. What does Harding think is the root of all of their problems at the hospital? Why does McMurphy disagree with him?

Harding thinks Nurse Ratched is a mean, cold, sexually repressed woman. She is the problem on the ward because she needs to be in control. McMurphy thinks the problem is deeper than that. He thinks there is “something bigger making all this mess,” but he is unable to explain what that is.

3. How is the revelation that Harding and the others are in the hospital voluntarily an example of irony?

It is ironic that McMurphy, who is the sanest man on the ward, is committed to the hospital and unable to leave, while the other Acutes are there by choice. They are free to leave, but will not check themselves out of the hospital, while McMurphy wants to leave, but cannot.

4. Find a reference to the belief that McMurphy is a Christ-like figure on page 166.

“You guys were coming to me like I was some kind of savior.”

5. Why does McMurphy say that the other patients in the ward have “conned ol’ R. P. McMurphy”? (Pg. 166)

McMurphy thinks the other patients conned him into fighting with Nurse Ratched, when they knew all along she has the power to keep him in the hospital indefinitely. They conned him into assuming all of the risk while they benefited from his confrontations with Nurse Ratched. They feel they have nothing to lose, but, of course, they are wrong; if McMurphy fails, they then go back to life in the ward as it was before he arrived.

Crossing the ground back to the ward...

1. What is the “Friday-night ringing” the Chief hears in his head?

The Chief is describing the sound of his heart beating fast from excitement. He felt this way years ago just before a football game. He is hearing his heart beat because he knows McMurphy is about to do something brave and exciting.

2. Why do you think McMurphy breaks the glass window and destroys any chance of winning his release from the hospital by conforming to Nurse Ratched’s rules? How is Bromden affected?

Answers will vary.

Example: McMurphy knows that to comply with Nurse Ratched is to give up his own identity. Even if he manages to get released from the hospital, Nurse Ratched wins. McMurphy does not want to be gutless like the other patients who have checked themselves into the hospital because they do not have the courage to face Nurse Ratched and others like her in the world. He decides to fight back. Rather than attack her directly, he breaks a symbol of her authority; he intrudes directly into her sacrosanct world, which previously had been separated from the patients by the daily-polished glass shield. The glass shatters like the sound of water, one of Bromden’s fears, and the ringing in his head has stopped.

Questions covering all of Part 2.

1. Discuss whether or not you think McMurphy is really insane and needs to be in the hospital.

Answers will vary.

Example: McMurphy is a violent man with strong sexual desires. He definitely defies the rules of society. These traits, however, make him a strong individual who makes mistakes, not an insane person who is a menace to society. For example: McMurphy is able to modify his behavior to comply with the hospital rules, when he thinks it is in his best interest to do so. When he decides to renew his battle with Nurse Ratched, McMurphy does so understanding the consequences of his actions. He may commit criminal acts according to the rules of society and the hospital, but he is not insane.

2. McMurphy believes Nurse Ratched is not to blame for the situation at the hospital. Do you agree or disagree with his assessment of her importance? Cite incidents from the story to support your answer.

Answers will vary.

Example: Nurse Ratched is a controlling person. She adheres to strict rules of conduct and believes, correctly or not, that it is best for the patients if they also obey the rules. She is, however, contributing to their illness by destroying their self-worth. McMurphy realizes the problems of the patients are the result of their inability to live in the outside world. The outside world exacerbated their illnesses by being unable to accept them as individuals. Somehow, each of them does not fit in. These problems are not created by Nurse Ratched. She does not help the men, but she did not cause their original illnesses.

3. Define “reliable” and “unreliable narrators.” Which kind of narrator is the Chief? Why do you think Kesey decided to tell this story from the Chief’s point-of-view? Cite incidents from the story to support your answer.

Answers will vary.

Example: The Chief is an unreliable narrator because he is clearly insane; he sees the world as a large Combine, and pretends to be deaf and dumb. The events he describes in the story are seen only from his perspective. Several times in the novel, he states that even if something did not really happen it is still the truth. The Chief is not quite sure himself if what he saw actually occurred.

The Chief is in a unique position to give the reader insights into the hospital from both the patients’ and staff’s points of view, but his insight cannot always be trusted.

PART 3...

After that, McMurphy had things his way...

1. List some ways McMurphy succeeds in disrupting the dull routine of Nurse Ratched's ward.

Answers may vary.

Example: He forms a basketball team, sleeps late, makes sexual comments to Nurse Ratched, organizes a fishing trip, writes nonsense in the log, and plays soccer in the day room. His deliberate shattering of the glass causes Bromden to comment that Ratched's "remote patience wasn't what it use to be." (Pg. 176) After the glass is shattered a third time by Martini's errant pass, it seems as though Ratched is struggling to maintain her composure.

2. State a theme for this story based on the following observations from the Chief:
"But I remembered one thing: it wasn't me that started acting deaf; it was people that first started acting like I was too dumb to hear or see or say anything at all." (Pg. 178)
"People will force you one way or the other, into doing what they think you should do." (Pg. 179)

Answers may vary.

Example: A person's problems are frequently society's fault.

3. One of the overall themes of this novel is the power of women to destroy men. Find an example of this power in the Chief's childhood story about when he first felt deaf and dumb.

A white woman comes with the government officials to talk to the Chief's father about selling his land to the government so they can build a dam. She is very shrewd and quickly realizes that talking to the Chief is counterproductive. She knows his wife is white and is the person in the family with the real power. She suggests they send his wife the offer by mistake and let her persuade the Chief to sign away the land.

4. What are the first words the Chief uses?

Bromden says, "thank you" to McMurphy for giving him some gum. (Pg. 185)

5. Explain how bigness or size plays an important part in this section.

Bromden sees himself as small, despite his actual size. His father, another huge Native-American was shrunk by his white wife. "The Combine's big – big." (Pg. 187) Alcohol also shrinks his father.

6. Why do you think McMurphy wants the Chief to lift the control panel? Is McMurphy motivated only by selfish interests? Cite incidents from the story to support your answer.

McMurphy wants the Chief to lift the control panel and to make money from Bromden doing so.

Answers will vary.

Example: McMurphy is going to help both himself and the Chief. McMurphy does not tell anyone else that the Chief can hear. He, also, is very understanding when he listens to the Chief and gives him time to complete his thoughts. McMurphy is going to use the Chief to make money by betting that he can move the panel, but he is going to let the Chief go on the trip for free. McMurphy understands that if the Chief can move the control panel, Bromden will be restored to his full size.

Two whores on their way down...

1. Why does McMurphy have trouble getting enough patients willing to go on his fishing trip? How does Nurse Ratched try to discredit McMurphy in front of the other patients?

Nurse Ratched tells the patients that a fishing trip is dangerous and has them scared to go. She also points out to the patients that McMurphy is going to make money on the fishing trip.

2. How does Billy react to Candy Starr?

Billy whistles his appreciation of her sexy looks. He is clearly interested in the girl.

3. Find another allusion to Christ before the men get to the boat.

“As McMurphy led the twelve of us toward the ocean” is a comparison between the fishermen and Jesus’ twelve disciples. (Pg. 203) These men are destined to change their lives and to keep McMurphy’s story alive after he dies.

4. Give two examples of changes in the outside world that the Chief describes as the Combine at work.

Answers will vary.

Example: The Chief sees “five thousand houses punched out identical by a machine.” and men in identical outfits exiting a train. The Chief attributes these examples of the loss of individuality to the Combine. (Pg. 203)

5. State a theme for this story based on the following passage.
- “While McMurphy laughs...Because he knows you have to laugh at the things that hurt you just to keep yourself in balance, just to keep the world from running you plumb crazy. He knows there’s a painful side; he knows my thumb smarts and his girl friend has a bruised breast and doctor is losing his glasses, but he won’t let the pain blot out the humor no more’n he’ll let the humor blot out the pain.” (Pg. 212)

Answers will vary.

Example: Life can be painful, but laughter helps a person to remain sane.

6. What does Bromden see the men do?

Life is making them swell up and get bigger.

7. On page 215, find a quotation which indicates that the men are different.

Answers will vary.

Example: “These weren’t the same bunch of weak-knees from a nuthouse...”

8. “...a set of tail-lights going past lit up McMurphy’s face, and the windshield reflected an expression that was allowed only because he figured it’d be too dark for anybody in the car to see, dreadfully tired and strained and *frantic*, like there wasn’t enough time left for something he had to do...” (Pg. 218)

What do you think is making McMurphy feel “tired” and “*frantic*” as the Chief describes him in the above quotation?

Answers will vary.

Example: McMurphy is trying to be jolly and find the fun in life despite his desperate need to get out of the mental hospital. He is beginning to get tired from the battle and frantic because he knows he cannot win. His actions in battling the Captain, the authorities, the service station men, the reluctance of the patients, and especially nurse Ratched are not for him, but for the other inmates. He must realize that despite winning frequently, he is losing and is in danger of losing more.

9. Why do you think Kesey includes a description of McMurphy’s first sexual experience in this section?

Answers will vary.

Example: McMurphy is remembering what his life was like before he was in the hospital and he is longing for those days of freedom. He also feels himself weakening, so just like an old man reminisces about past glories, McMurphy relives his youthful antics.

PART 4

The Big Nurse had her next maneuver...

Note: There is a great deal of profanity in the scene when McMurphy confronts the aide.

1. Briefly describe the Big Nurse's "next maneuver." To what extent is she successful?

The Big Nurse tries to discredit McMurphy by pointing out to the other patients that McMurphy is only looking out for his own selfish interests. She does this at a group meeting when McMurphy is absent and cannot defend himself. Harding and many of the other patients agree that McMurphy is a con man, but Harding applauds his capitalistic abilities. The Chief and, especially Billy, still view McMurphy as a hero.

2. What happens to help McMurphy understand that he is a role model, a hero, for the other patients, rather than just a good con man?

McMurphy makes the Chief lift the control panel to win his bets with the other patients. The Chief refuses to accept the five-dollar payment McMurphy offers him as his share of the profits. Then the Chief tell McMurphy that the patients thought he was more than just a con man trying to win things. They thought of him as their hero.

3. Why do you suppose the Chief decides to help McMurphy fight with the aides when they torture George in the shower?

The Chief enters the fight when the black aide calls for the other aides to help him subdue McMurphy. The Chief knows that McMurphy is tired because he can see it in his face, but McMurphy fights for George anyway. The Chief joins the fight to keep McMurphy from being outnumbered. The Chief picks up an aide who has joined in and realizes that "he didn't weigh more'n ten or fifteen pounds," another sign of Bromden's increasing sanity. (Pg. 231)

Up on Disturbed...

1. Why do you think McMurphy refuses to admit he was wrong when he fought with the orderlies?

Answers will vary.

Example: McMurphy considers such an admission to be like signing a confession for the enemy. He refuses to give in partly because Nurse Ratched is threatening him with electro shock therapy, partly out of concern for Bromden, and partly because he is the type of person who is unwilling to let someone get an advantage over him.

2. Some critics believe McMurphy is being compared to Christ because of the Christ-like images in this chapter. Find an example of one of these images. For what reasons do you agree or disagree with the idea that McMurphy is a Christ-like figure?

Answers will vary.

Example: McMurphy asks if he gets a crown of thorns just before he is given EST. He is Christ-like because he is sacrificing himself to help the other patients on the ward. The position for EST is in a cross. He quotes from the 23rd Psalm.

Use the following passage from the story to answer the next two questions.

“Ting. Tingle, tingle, tremble toes, she’s a good fisherman, catches hens, puts ‘em inna pens... wire blier, limber lock, three geese inna flock... one flew east, one flew west, one flew over the cuckoo’s nest... O-U-T- spells out...goose swoops down and plucks you out.” (Pg. 239)

3. Geese appeared in this novel numerous other times. The Chief’s father talks about seeing geese to make the government men feel stupid, and the Chief sees a dog chasing geese when he looks out of the hospital window. Geese appear again in this rhyme. What do you think geese symbolize in this story? Support your answer with incidents from the novel.

Answers will vary.

Example: Geese symbolize freedom. The Chief’s father is trying to preserve the Indians’ freedom of their own way of life by refusing to talk to the government officials. The dog is chasing the geese who represent freedom, even at the risk of being hit by a car. The goose in the rhyme picks someone out. Harding used to be the bull goose looney.

4. What is the significance of the title of this novel? What is the cuckoo’s nest and who is the one who flies over it?

McMurphy is the goose who flies over the cuckoo’s nest and pulls Bromden out. “Cuckoo” is a slang word for crazy. McMurphy helps the inmates, particularly the Chief, overcome their problems.

5. What sentence or sentences in this section indicate that the Chief knows he is now strong enough to overcome the effects of the Combine?

Answers will vary.

Examples: “I saw an aide coming up the hall with a tray for me and knew this time I had them beat.” “It’s fogging a little, but I won’t slip off and hide in it. No...never again...”(Pg. 241)

6. What figure of speech is illustrated in the sentence, “I staggered toward the little round chicken-wired window in the door of the room and tapped it with my knuckles.” (Pg. 241)

This use of foreshadowing predicts the method Bromden uses to escape from the hospital.

There had been times...

1. Why does Nurse Ratched decide to return McMurphy to the ward, even though he refuses to admit he was wrong to fight in the shower?

McMurphy has gained additional hero status among the other inmates since he has been gone. As McMurphy's legend grows, Nurse Ratched's power is diminished. She decides to bring him back to the ward so the men can see for themselves how the shock therapy has weakened him.

2. For what reason does McMurphy decide to delay his escape even after Nurse Ratched threatens him with a lobotomy?

McMurphy wants to wait until after Billy has his date with Candy.

3. List three important developments that occur during the party.

The patients look through their medical folders. Harding tricks the supervisor. Then he reminds the patients that Ratched will punish them. Billy and Candy go off together. Everyone gets drunk. Bromden realizes that “square in the center of the Combine's most powerful stronghold,” the patients have proven themselves to be men, at least for now. (Pg. 255)

Use the following quotation to answer the next two questions.

“I discovered at an early age that I was - shall we be kind and say different? It's a better, more general word than the other one. I indulged in certain practices that our society regards as shameful. And I got sick. It wasn't the practices, I don't think, it was the feeling that the great, deadly, pointing fore-finger of society as pointing at me...‘Shame. Shame.’ ” (Pg. 257)

4. What is Harding confessing to in the above passage?

Harding had homosexual tendencies.

5. State a theme for this novel that explains the root causes of some mental illnesses.

Answers will vary.

Example: Weak individuals who do not conform to society's expectations of normalcy will sometimes become mentally ill.

6. Cite incidents from the story to prove or disprove the following statement:
McMurphy never intended to escape from the hospital.

Answers will vary.

Example: McMurphy did intend to make his escape from the hospital. He is cocky enough to wait until the last minute. Unfortunately, he did not realize how much his strength was eroded by the strain of EST, so he overslept. It is possible that McMurphy used the last bit of strength he had to help the others. He knows he no longer has the strength to make it in the outside world, so he just goes to sleep without trying to escape. Conceivably, he simply was too drunk; however, Kesey describes McMurphy and Candy as "two tired little kids," innocent and helpless, unaware of the future, almost like the first time McMurphy made love. (Pg. 262)

I've given what happened next...

1. What is the significance of this description of Ratched: "a lock of her hair had broken loose from beneath her white cap..."?

It indicates her anger and frustration. This is the first indication of a chink in her perfect appearance.

2. Why and how does Billy commit suicide?

Nurse Ratched is able to make Billy feel like a child again when she threatens to tell his mother about his night with Candy. Billy cannot deal with the possibility of hurting his mother despite having tasted manhood, so he kills himself. He is only able to do it because Ratched puts him alone in the doctor's office.

3. Why can Harding, the Chief, and all of the other patients not stop McMurphy from attacking Nurse Ratched?

The Chief believes no one could prevent McMurphy's actions because the patients are the ones making him fight Nurse Ratched. He is acting the part of their hero because they desperately need one.

4. What are some differences in Nurse Ratched when she returns to the ward after McMurphy's attack?

She jumps when the patients approach. Her face is swollen, and she wears a neck brace. One eye is completely closed and her new uniform cannot conceal "the fact that she was a woman." (Pg. 268) She cannot speak (like Bromden?) and must write her answers down.

5. Cite incidents from the story to state whether or not you agree with the following statement: The Chief did not really kill McMurphy, because he was already dead.

Answers will vary.

Example: The Chief killed McMurphy's body; the lobotomy had already killed McMurphy's spirit and individuality. The Chief states that "The big hard body had a tough grip on life." He did not say McMurphy had a grip on life. To the Chief, McMurphy was already dead. Bromden does not want Ratched to have this trophy, this shell of McMurphy "in the day room with his name tacked on it for twenty or thirty years so the Big nurse could use it as an example of what can happen if you buck the system." (Pg. 270) This quotation is another major theme in the story: breaking society's rules can lead to disaster or destruction.

6. In what way does the Chief behave like McMurphy after he escapes from the hospital?

The Chief tells the Mexican guy who gives him a ride that he is a professional Indian wrestler. The Chief is spinning a story, just like McMurphy, in order to both entertain the driver and help himself by getting a ride away from the hospital.

Questions covering all of Part 4

1. What heroic qualities does McMurphy exhibit in this last section? Cite incidents from the story to support your answer.

Answers will vary.

Example: McMurphy is brave, self sacrificing, and a good leader. He stays at the hospital instead of leaving early. He shows the other patients that Nurse Ratched is human and can be overcome. He has given the men the abilities to be free of Big Nurse, the Combine, and their own fears.

2. What is the significance of McMurphy's motorcycle cap?

Bromden tries it on, but finds it "too small." This size reference is an indication that through McMurphy's help and by putting McMurphy out of Ratched's clutches forever, Bromden has regained his full size and strength.

3. State your opinion of the ending to this story. Was it necessary for McMurphy to both be given a lobotomy and be killed by the Chief? What do you think Kesey is saying about the power of the individual to win over the restrictions of society by ending his book in this way?

Answers will vary.

Example: Kesey is saying that a man must fight against society's power to control his individual freedoms, even though he may die in the battle. McMurphy dies, but his struggle serves as a model to help many others to find the strength they need to continue the battle.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

Study Guide Student Copy

Note: There are no numbered chapters in this book, but each of the four parts is broken down into scenes. For clarity in this Unit, the first few words of each scene are used as the heading.

PART 1

They're out there.

1. Why do the black hospital workers not "...bother not talking out loud about their hate secrets when." the Chief is around? (Pg. 10) In what ways does being half-Indian help the Chief?
2. What does the following description of Nurse Ratched suggest to the reader about her character?
"A mistake was made somehow in manufacturing, putting those big, womanly breasts on what would of otherwise been a perfect work, and you can see how bitter she is about it." (Pg. 11)

Use the following passage from this section to answer the next three questions:

“(A blue tick hound bays out there in the fog, running scared and lost because he can’t see. No tracks on the ground but the ones he’s making, and he sniffs in every direction with his cold red-rubber nose and picks up no scent but his own fear, fear burning down into him like steam.) It’s gonna burn me just that way, finally telling about all this, about the hospital, and her, and the guys - and about McMurphy...this is too awful to be the truth!...But it’s the truth even if it didn’t happen.” (Pg. 13)

3. What relationship is the author suggesting between the blue tick hound and Chief Bromden?
4. Speculate on the significance of the fog in this story. What do you think it may symbolize? How do flashbacks of the Chief’s childhood help him find his way out of the fog?
5. In what ways is this passage an example of foreshadowing? How does point of view factor into the story?

When the fog clears to where I can see, I'm sitting in the day room.

1. How does the Chief know the new Admission is “no ordinary Admission”?
2. What evidence is there in this section of patient abuse?
3. Briefly describe R. P. McMurphy. What does the description of McMurphy's hands suggest to the reader about his character? Why is the Chief impressed with McMurphy's laugh?
4. Define “psychopath.” Why is McMurphy in the hospital?

The new man stands looking a minute, to get the set-up of the day room.

1. Briefly identify Ellis and Ruckly. Why do you think the author includes so many details about these two minor characters?
2. Describe Harding. Why do you think Billy identifies Harding as the “bull goose loony”? What do Harding's hands reveal about his character?
3. What new information is revealed about Chief Bromden when McMurphy asks Billy Bibbit about him?
4. What pieces of information are revealed near the end of the section? (Pgs. 27-28)

In the glass Station the Big Nurse has opened a package...

1. What is the dictionary definition of the noun “Combine”? What is the Chief’s definition?
2. Nurse Ratched maintains control of her ward by hand-picking the doctor and the orderlies. Briefly describe the doctor, three black orderlies, and why she thinks they qualify for their jobs.
3. Find a passage on page 32 that illustrates the recurring motif in this novel that Bromden feels the hospital is like a machine.
4. Find an example of irony on page 36.
5. What happens to Mr. Taber under Nurse Ratched’s care? Why do you think the author includes this information about Mr. Taber at this point in the story?

Before noon time they're at the fog machine...

1. Find a simile on page 42.
2. Review the definition of a psychopath from the first section in Part I. What evidence is there in McMurphy's record that supports the diagnosis that he is a psychopath?
3. What is the theory of the Therapeutic Community? Cite incidents from the story to support or refute the following statement: Nurse Ratched's ward follows the principles of a Therapeutic Community.
4. What is the double meaning of Pete Bancini's comment, "I'm *tired*"?
5. Harding has been humiliated by the others concerning his wife and her affairs. How does McMurphy describe what happened at the group meeting?
6. What is Harding's reaction?
7. Define "matriarchy." Some critics of this book believe Kesey is accusing women of trying to run the world and emasculate the males of the world. Cite incidents from the story which support this idea.

8. List the punishments in order of severity that await any patient who refuses to answer Nurse Ratched's questions.
9. "You are strapped to a table, shaped, ironically, like a cross, with a crown of electric sparks in place of thorns. You are touched on each side of the head with wires."
(Pgs. 64-65)

Why do you think the punishment for disrupting the routine of the ward is described using Christ-like images? Speculate on what the author may be implying about McMurphy's fate if he continues to disrupt Nurse Ratched's ward.

10. State a theme for this novel based on the following passage from the novel.

"I haven't heard a real laugh since I came through that door, do you know that? Man, when you lose your laugh you lose your *footing*. A man go around lettin' a woman whup him down till he can't laugh any more, and he loses one of the biggest edges he's got on his side." (Pg. 65-66)

11. What bet does McMurphy make with the other inmates? Why does he think he is "safe" in making this bet?

One Christmas at midnight...

1. “When nothing else is going on, you usually got the fog or the time control to contend with, but today something’s happened: there hasn’t been any of these things worked on us all day.” (Pgs. 71-72)

What is the “time control”? What is different in the ward so that the Chief does not experience the fog or the time control?

2. Describe McMurphy’s underwear. What do you think they symbolize in this story? Explain the significance of the “aces and eights” tattoo.
3. How does McMurphy discover that Chief Bromden is only pretending to be deaf and dumb? Since McMurphy discovers the Chief’s secret so quickly, what conclusions can be made about the level of care in this hospital?

First time for a long, long time...

Use the following quotation from this section to answer the next two questions:

“...somebody’ll drag me out of the fog and we’ll be back on the ward and there won’t be a sign of what went on tonight and if I was fool enough to try and tell anybody about it they’d say, Idiot, you just had a nightmare; things as crazy as a big machine room down in the bowels of a dam where people get cut up by robot workers don’t exist.

But if they don’t exist, how can a man see them?” (Pg. 82)

1. One of the overall themes of this novel is the confusion about who is sane and who is insane. What does this passage tell the reader about the Chief’s sanity?
2. State a theme for this novel based on the confusion between sanity and insanity.
3. Find the ironic statement at the end of the section.

Come morning, McMurphy is up...

1. McMurphy brushes his teeth with soap powder and the Chief remembers his father talking to government officials on the reservation. What do these two incidents have in common? In what way is the Chief like his father?
2. Find a definition of “oppression,” as it might be used to describe mental patients. In what way can Nurse Ratched’s behavior toward the other inmates be considered oppressive?
3. Why do you think the Chief believes Nurse Ratched would rather McMurphy had “been stark naked under that towel than had on those shorts”? (Pg. 90)
4. Find a passage in this section, other than the one describing his shorts, that compares McMurphy to the freedom available in nature.

All through breakfast...

1. Cite an incident at breakfast where McMurphy seems to be following the rules, but is really poking fun at them.
2. What “little battle” does McMurphy win against Nurse Ratched?
3. Why do you think the Chief experiences a return of the “fog” at the end of this section?

There’s a Monopoly game...

1. In this scene, McMurphy and the other acutes are playing a confusing monopoly game. Speculate on how the game might have been played if Nurse Ratched were running the game instead of McMurphy.

There's long spells...

1. McMurphy manages to hold his temper when faced with Nurse Ratched, the aides, and their infantile rules. What happens to finally make McMurphy lose control?
2. Briefly outline McMurphy's way to escape from the hospital. What bet does he make with the men? Despite McMurphy's inability to move the panel, why does he believe he still walks away the "winner"? How is this a type of climax for the first portion of the book?

A visiting doctor... It's getting hard...There's a shipment...

1. Use the three incidents in these sections to prove or disprove the following statement: The Chief is beginning to understand that being "safe" is the cowardly way to live.

I know how...

1. What is the actual source of Bromden's fog?
2. What are Billy's problems?
3. The Chief is close to succumbing to the power of the fog. What happens to pull him back to reality?
4. In the battle between Nurse Ratched and McMurphy, who do you think is the winner at the end of Part One? For what reason can this scene be called a turning point in the story.
5. Find the irony in the last paragraph of part one.

Questions covering all of Part 1

1. Critics refer to some scenes in this section as “black humor.” They deal with disturbing subjects like death with bitter humor. Cite three examples of black comedy in Part 1.
2. Discuss the importance of names in this novel: Ratched, Big Nurse, Chief Broom, Billy Bibbitt.
3. Cite incidents from the story to support or refute the following statement: The women in this story are being blamed for the illnesses many of the men suffer.
4. Cite incidents from the story to support or refute the following statement: Laughter and sex are necessary for a man to live a sane and happy life.
5. This novel was written in the 1960’s, a time where individuals believed that sometimes rules needed to be broken so that the individual can grow. Discuss the rules in the hospital and how they may be inhibiting the patient’s road to sanity.

PART 2

Just at the edge...

1. How does the Chief get the "...full force of the dangers we let ourselves in for when we let McMurphy lure us out of the fog"? (Pg. 130)
2. What does Alvin say that causes the other staff members to "...glare at him like he's said some awful vulgar thing"? (Pg. 133) Why do they turn on him? In what way is this meeting similar to the group therapy meetings Nurse Ratched has with the patients?
3. What does the discussion about McMurphy's diagnosis tell the reader about the possible abuses in mental hospitals?
4. "No. He isn't extraordinary. He is simply a man and no more, and is subject to all the fears and all the cowardice and all the timidity that any other man is subject to. Given a few more days, I have a very strong feeling that he will prove this, to us as well as the rest of the patients." (Pg. 136)

What does the above quotation reveal about Nurse Ratched's motivations for keeping McMurphy on her floor instead of transferring him to the Disturbed ward?

5. Find a passage in this section that lets the reader know Nurse Ratched has enough power to conquer McMurphy.
6. What is significant about the word "committed"?

The way the Big Nurse acted

1. Why does the Chief think McMurphy is strong enough to battle Nurse Ratched? What is it about his character that gives him this strength?
2. The Chief observes a dog watching geese and sniffing for squirrels. It will probably be hit by an oncoming car. What does this extended metaphor represent?

In the group meetings...

1. What significant understanding does McMurphy have in the pool? How does it affect Bromden?
2. Compare the group meeting at the beginning of this section when they are discussing cigarettes, with the group meeting at the end of this section. How has McMurphy's attitude changed?
3. What impact does this have on Cheswick? Point out another case of the "unreliable narrator."
4. Why is the Chief afraid of the pool?

Up ahead of me...

1. Why does Sefelt refuse to take his anti-seizure medication?
2. Why do you think the last sentence in this section compares McMurphy's face to Sefelt's face after his seizure? "His face has commenced to take on that same haggard, puzzled look of pressure that the face on the floor has." (Pg. 155)

Whatever it was...

1. What does this short scene tell the reader about the impact McMurphy's compliance to Nurse Ratched's rules is having on the Chief?

They take me with the Acutes...

1. Briefly describe Vera Harding. Do you agree or disagree with Harding's contention that his wife is responsible for his problems?
2. What does McMurphy get angry about? How does he show that his situation is bothering him greatly?

I remember it was a Friday...

1. State a theme for this story based on the following conversation between McMurphy and Harding about electric shock therapy.

“If they were going to knock a man in the head, they needed to use something surer and more accurate than a hammer; they finally settled on electricity.”
“Jesus, didn’t they think it might do some damage? Didn’t the public raise Cain about it?”
“I don’t think you fully understand the public, my friend; in this country, when something is out of order, then the quickest way to get it fixed is the best way.” (Pg. 164)
2. What does Harding think is the root of all of their problems at the hospital? Why does McMurphy disagree with him?
3. How is the revelation that Harding and the others are in the hospital voluntarily an example of irony?
4. Find a reference to the belief that McMurphy is a Christ-like figure on page 166.
5. Why does McMurphy say that the other patients in the ward have “conned ol’ R. P. McMurphy”? (Pg. 166)

Crossing the ground back to the ward...

1. What is the “Friday-night ringing” the Chief hears in his head?
2. Why do you think McMurphy breaks the glass window and destroys any chance of winning his release from the hospital by conforming to Nurse Ratched’s rules? How is Bromden affected?

Questions covering all of Part 2.

1. Discuss whether or not you think McMurphy is really insane and needs to be in the hospital.
2. McMurphy believes Nurse Ratched is not to blame for the situation at the hospital. Do you agree or disagree with his assessment of her importance? Cite incidents from the story to support your answer.
3. Define “reliable” and “unreliable narrators.” Which kind of narrator is the Chief? Why do you think Kesey decided to tell this story from the Chief’s point-of-view? Cite incidents from the story to support your answer.

PART 3...

After that, McMurphy had things his way...

1. List some ways McMurphy succeeds in disrupting the dull routine of Nurse Ratched's ward.
2. State a theme for this story based on the following observations from the Chief:
 "But I remembered one thing: it wasn't me that started acting deaf; it was people that first started acting like I was too dumb to hear or see or say anything at all." (Pg. 178)
 "People will force you one way or the other, into doing what they think you should do." (Pg. 179)
3. One of the overall themes of this novel is the power of women to destroy men. Find an example of this power in the Chief's childhood story about when he first felt deaf and dumb.
4. What are the first words the Chief uses?
5. Explain how bigness or size plays an important part in this section.
6. Why do you think McMurphy wants the Chief to lift the control panel? Is McMurphy motivated only by selfish interests? Cite incidents from the story to support your answer.

Two whores on their way down...

1. Why does McMurphy have trouble getting enough patients willing to go on his fishing trip? How does Nurse Ratched try to discredit McMurphy in front of the other patients?
2. How does Billy react to Candy Starr?
3. Find another allusion to Christ before the men get to the boat.
4. Give two examples of changes in the outside world that the Chief describes as the Combine at work.
5. State a theme for this story based on the following passage.

“While McMurphy laughs...Because he knows you have to laugh at the things that hurt you just to keep yourself in balance, just to keep the world from running you plumb crazy. He knows there’s a painful side; he knows my thumb smarts and his girl friend has a bruised breast and doctor is losing his glasses, but he won’t let the pain blot out the humor no more’n he’ll let the humor blot out the pain.” (Pg. 212)
6. What does Bromden see the men do?
7. On page 215, find a quotation which indicates that the men are different.

8. "...a set of tail-lights going past lit up McMurphy's face, and the windshield reflected an expression that was allowed only because he figured it'd be too dark for anybody in the car to see, dreadfully tired and strained and *frantic*, like there wasn't enough time left for something he had to do..." (Pg. 218)

What do you think is making McMurphy feel "tired" and "*frantic*" as the Chief describes him in the above quotation?

9. Why do you think Kesey includes a description of McMurphy's first sexual experience in this section?

PART 4

The Big Nurse had her next maneuver...

Note: There is a great deal of profanity in the scene when McMurphy confronts the aide.

1. Briefly describe the Big Nurse's "next maneuver." To what extent is she successful?
2. What happens to help McMurphy understand that he is a role model, a hero, for the other patients, rather than just a good con man?
3. Why do you suppose the Chief decides to help McMurphy fight with the aides when they torture George in the shower?

Up on Disturbed...

1. Why do you think McMurphy refuses to admit he was wrong when he fought with the orderlies?
2. Some critics believe McMurphy is being compared to Christ because of the Christ-like images in this chapter. Find an example of one of these images. For what reasons do you agree or disagree with the idea that McMurphy is a Christ-like figure?

Use the following passage from the story to answer the next two questions.

“Ting. Tingle, tingle, tremble toes, she’s a good fisherman, catches hens, puts ‘em inna pens... wire blier, limber lock, three geese inna flock... one flew east, one flew west, one flew over the cuckoo’s nest... O-U-T- spells out...goose swoops down and plucks you out.” (Pg. 239)

3. Geese appeared in this novel numerous other times. The Chief’s father talks about seeing geese to make the government men feel stupid, and the Chief sees a dog chasing geese when he looks out of the hospital window. Geese appear again in this rhyme. What do you think geese symbolize in this story? Support your answer with incidents from the novel.
4. What is the significance of the title of this novel? What is the cuckoo’s nest and who is the one who flies over it?
5. What sentence or sentences in this section indicate that the Chief knows he is now strong enough to overcome the effects of the Combine?
6. What figure of speech is illustrated in the sentence, “I staggered toward the little round chicken-wired window in the door of the room and tapped it with my knuckles.” (Pg. 241)

There had been times...

1. Why does Nurse Ratched decide to return McMurphy to the ward, even though he refuses to admit he was wrong to fight in the shower?
2. For what reason does McMurphy decide to delay his escape even after Nurse Ratched threatens him with a lobotomy?
3. List three important developments that occur during the party.

Use the following quotation to answer the next two questions.

“I discovered at an early age that I was - shall we be kind and say different? It's a better, more general word than the other one. I indulged in certain practices that our society regards as shameful. And I got sick. It wasn't the practices, I don't think, it was the feeling that the great, deadly, pointing fore-finger of society as pointing at me... 'Shame. Shame.' ” (Pg. 257)

4. What is Harding confessing to in the above passage?
5. State a theme for this novel that explains the root causes of some mental illnesses.
6. Cite incidents from the story to prove or disprove the following statement: McMurphy never intended to escape from the hospital.

I've given what happened next...

1. What is the significance of this description of Ratched: "a lock of her hair had broken loose from beneath her white cap..."?
2. Why and how does Billy commit suicide?
3. Why can Harding, the Chief, and all of the other patients not stop McMurphy from attacking Nurse Ratched?
4. What are some differences in Nurse Ratched when she returns to the ward after McMurphy's attack?
5. Cite incidents from the story to state whether or not you agree with the following statement: The Chief did not really kill McMurphy, because he was already dead.
6. In what way does the Chief behave like McMurphy after he escapes from the hospital?

Questions covering all of Part 4

1. What heroic qualities does McMurphy exhibit in this last section? Cite incidents from the story to support your answer.

2. What is the significance of McMurphy's motorcycle cap?

3. State your opinion of the ending to this story. Was it necessary for McMurphy to both be given a lobotomy and be killed by the Chief? What do you think Kesey is saying about the power of the individual to win over the restrictions of society by ending his book in this way?

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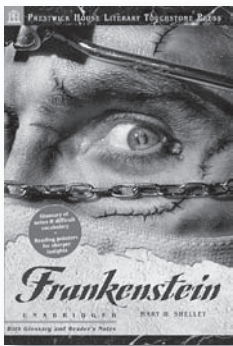
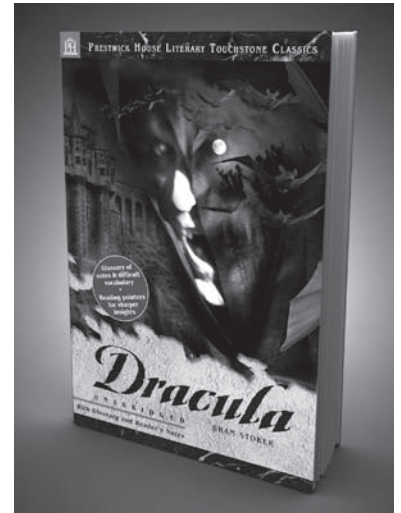
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