



 Prestwick House

Activity Pack

ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST

BY KEN KESY



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Written by S. T. Wein

Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading**Biography****Objective:** Writing a biographical sketch**Activity**

Ken Kesey wrote in abundance and in every possible form, including children's stories. He also wrote in collaboration with other authors, edited manuscripts, and added his talents to a number of anthologies.

Kesey was a most interesting man, even apart from the fact that he was a contributor to an era that questioned authority and railed against it with actions as well as words. He was idolized years ago, and many revere him today as a hero of literature and lifestyle. Write a short biography of Ken Kesey, including the titles of his most important books.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Part 1**Setting****Objective:** Visualizing the setting of the book**Activity**

The beginning of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* introduces the hospital setting as if the reader were standing in the corridor. The area becomes slowly revealed through the actions of "Chief Broom," the first character we encounter and also the book's narrator. The Chief's job is to maintain the entire ward by sweeping and mopping the floors, and cleaning walls and windows. A supposed deaf mute, the Chief is able to learn many things from the staff's conversations. His position in the corridor gives him a clear view of the ward.

Make a sketch of what you think the hospital ward looks like, including the location of the Big Nurse's glassed-in booth, her desk, the mop closet, the shaving room, the tub room, the room where the patients sleep, and the hall.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Part 1**Simile****Objective:** Recognizing a simile**Activity**

Ken Kesey frequently employs the simile through palpable images and unusual comparisons. For example, on the second page of the text, Bromden compares the color of the Big Nurse's fingertips with a very unusual item: "Funny orange. Like the tip of a soldering iron. Color so hot or so cold if she touches you with it you can't tell which."

Part 1 contains many similes used to vividly describe objects, actions, or people. Write at least ten similes you find in Part 1 and write the page number on which each is found. The first one is a completed example for you. Afterward, pick the one that appeals to you the most and rewrite it, using a different literary term, such as metaphor or personification. Label your revised literary phrasing.

"He opens out his nostrils like black funnels, his out-sized head bobbing this way and that as he sniffs, and he sucks in fear from all over the ward."

His nose has a life of its own; it hunts down and hones in on the patients' fears. (Personification)

Name: _____

Date: _____

Part I – End**Role Models****Objective:** Assessing characters' personalities**Activity**

Many people we meet present themselves in a way that we can admire. The ones we respect and like may be referred to as role models, people whose examples we would like to follow. We seldom choose to emulate people who display negative characteristics, but even misguided or troubled people can have admirable traits, such as perseverance, familial loyalty, or adherence to purpose.

Randle Patrick McMurphy, for example, has some traits you might not want to copy, but he possesses good attributes that make him a role model to most of the patients in his ward. While he has not proven himself to be a well-respected member of society, he does show himself to be a natural leader.

For the following activity, choose any five characters from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* that you could use as role models and explain what qualities of theirs you might like to possess. Write each one's name, note the features of each one that you admire, and give reasons why you think you might appreciate having those traits. One example is given.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Part 2**Characterization****Objective:** Tracking the evolution of the main character**Activity**

In this part of the novel, we see a dramatic change in Randle McMurphy's outlook, one that makes his fellow patients react differently to him and one which greatly affects his own reactions to Nurse Ratched. In Part 1, McMurphy is determined to overturn Nurse Ratched's influence on the men and decrease her power over the decisions made in the ward.

A series of events abets McMurphy's about-face. One catalyst is McMurphy's hearing the pool lifeguards say, "being committed ain't like being sentenced. 'You're sentenced in a jail, and you got a date ahead of you when you *know* you're gonna be turned loose.'" (Pg. 147) McMurphy realizes that the nurse is the primary determiner of when a person is ready to be released. He has second thoughts about pursuing his immediate plan to outsmart the nurse.

Cite and explain a few incidents in Part 2 that either make McMurphy change his point of view and his actions or that reveal that he has actually changed them. Quote the text and include the page numbers. Explain the effect each incident has on McMurphy or what it reveals about his character.

We have completed one for you.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Part 2**Letter Writing****Objective:** Writing from the perspective of a patient**Activity**

The residents of the hospital are allowed to have visitors; although only a few are mentioned in the book, we know they exist because they are mentioned in group meetings. Patients are encouraged to speak of their families, but the Big Nurse frequently uses the information imparted to gain more control over the patients.

Write a letter home to Billy Bibbit's mother as he might dictate it to you. Imagine that she has been informed of some action of Billy's that Nurse Ratched considers wrong, and for which he feels guilty. You may relate the letter to any of the activities in which Billy is involved or to any reactions he might have about McMurphy. It is unnecessary to imitate his stuttering.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Part 3**Imagery****Objective:** Rewriting examples of imagery**Activity**

In Part 3, there are many distinct passages where the use of imagery gives the reader an exact picture of something or someone because the figurative language used by Ken Kesey is very clear. In this activity you are going to take the author's portraits and repaint them as you would have written the particular scene, event or character.

In Part 2, for example, we are given the picture of McMurphy striding up to the Nurses' Station and running his fist through the glass enclosure.

“He walked with long steps, too long, and he had his thumbs hooked in his pockets again. The iron in his boot heels cracked lightning out of the tile. He was the logger again, the swaggering gambler, the big redheaded brawling Irishman, the cowboy out of the TV set walking down the middle of the street to meet a dare.”

Find several instances of imagery in Part 3, and rewrite them using your own descriptive terms. For each, list the quote and page number before you rewrite the quotation. Follow it with your writing. The above passage has been rewritten below for you.

We couldn't believe what we saw. It was the reincarnation of John Wayne rising up in his saddle, swinging a leg down on the ground at the same time he was yanking a six-shooter out of his holster. He had fire in the meeting of his eyebrows and he threatened to burn the place down with it. McMurphy was back; his old self had reappeared.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Parts 1, 2, and 3**Essay Writing****Objective:** Translating a character's meaning**Activity**

Throughout the book, Chief Bromden makes mention of “the Combine.” He asks how McMurphy managed to avoid being controlled by it. Bromden has many other fantasies; some are mechanical, some are fog-like, and others are hard to categorize, but they are very distinct and odd. Skim through the book, locate some of his hallucinations, and make a list of some specific details about the Chief's mental aberrations. You may quote from the book, but that is not necessary; follow the form below for citing the page numbers where each incident is located.

Try to come up with at least ten examples. After making the list, you will discuss the items with the rest of the class to get a more accurate picture of Bromden's illness. You should also realize that his mental problems also color the ways in which he can accurately narrate the book.

We have begun the list for you:

1. “Hum of black machinery, humming hate and death and other hospital secrets.”
2. Bromden thinks Ratched is blowing up bigger and bigger, changing shape, using sectioned, metallic arms.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Part 4**Letter Writing****Objective:** Writing a letter to the author**Activity**

You might want to ask Ken Kesey a few things or point out a few things regarding the book, the way he wrote it or the way it ended. You have an opportunity to express your opinion about the book in a letter to him now.

Write the author a letter and tell him what you think of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. You might discuss the book's origin, the style, the characters, the ending, or anything else. Near the end of your letter, make sure to explain how the novel affected you and what you thought of it.

We have started the first paragraph for you.

Dear Mr. Kesey,

I have just finished reading *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and there are a few things I would like to have you clear up for me....