

HIGH SCHOOL | BLUE VALLEY DISTRICT NOVEL RATIONALE

***One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey**

English Language Arts, 12th Grade

WHAT'S THE STORY?

Kesey relates the story of the clash between the repressive and rebellious wills, respectively, of Nurse Ratched and Randle Patrick McMurphy from the viewpoint of a paranoid schizophrenic named Chief Bromden. With the exception of a fishing excursion led by McMurphy with an accompanying doctor and eleven patients, the entire novel is set in the psychiatric hospital where McMurphy may or may not be feigning insanity to escape the hard labor of a work farm. The patients are classified either as Acutes or Chronics; the former considered curable and whose stay at the hospital is voluntary; while the latter are failed attempts of the hospital's staff to force its conformity on patients through electroshock therapy and lobotomies. The Acutes have succumbed to incomplete lives wherein the arbitrary whims of an increasingly mechanized and feminized society has emasculated them and rendered them ineffectual.

McMurphy invigorates the Acutes and the Chronic Chief with his open, frank heterosexuality, anti-academic, and rebellious approach to life. This contrasts strongly with Nurse Ratched's attempts to control the men, inevitably leading to a series of comically rendered showdowns. The novel turns more serious, however, when the men begin to adopt McMurphy's attitudes, resulting in Nurse Ratched's escalation of her repressive tactics. Increasingly relying on New Testament portrayals of the Passion and crucifixion of Jesus Christ, Chief relates Ratched's victory over McMurphy when she has him lobotomized. Her victory is short-lived, however, as McMurphy's lessons to the men result in many of the Acutes leaving the hospital. Chief suffocates McMurphy and escapes from the hospital, in an ending that is both heroic and ambiguous.

CONNECTIONS TO CURRICULUM*

The following are some, but not all, of the connections to curriculum for this novel.

- **Unit 2: Complex Issues**
 - Essential Questions: "How can examining complex issues from different perspectives influence people?" "How can we effectively present ideas and address other viewpoints?"
- **Unit 3: Personal Responsibility**
 - Essential Question: "How does personal responsibility affect not only the individual but also the world as a whole?"
- **Unit 4: Universal Human Experience**
 - Essential Question: "How can reading reveal universal truths about the human experience?"

KEY STANDARDS ADDRESSED

- Read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems. RL.12.13
- Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text. RL.12.2
- Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging. RL.12.5
- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain. RL.12.1
- Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 11–12 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies. RL.12.11
- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings. RL.12.12