# One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest Study Guide Part 1 Chapters 1-16

**CHAPTER 1: THEY’RE OUT THERE.**

1. Why do the African American hospital workers not “…bother not talking out loud about their hate secrets when.” The Chief is around? 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.”*

**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.”*

1. What relationship is the author suggesting between the blue tick hound and Chief Bromden?
2. 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?
3. In what ways is this passage an example of foreshadowing? How does point of view factor into the story?

**CHAPTER 2: 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?

**CHAPTER 3: 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?

**CHAPTER 4: IN THE GLASS STATION THE BIG NURSE HAS OPENED A PACKAGE…**

1. What is the dictionary definition of htenoun “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?

**CHAPTER 5: BEFORE NOON TIME THEY’RE AT THE FOG MACHINE…**

1. Find a simile on this page.
2. What is the definition of a psychopath?
3. What is the definition of a sociopath?
4. What evidence is there in McMurphy’s record that supports the diagnosis that he is a psychopath?
5. What is the theory of the Therapeutic Community?
6. Cite incidents from the story that support or refute the following statement: Nurse Ratched’s ward follows the principals of a Therapeutic Community.
7. What is the double meaning of Pete Bancini’s comment, “I’m tired”?
8. Harding has been humiliated by the others concerning his wife and her affairs. How does McMurphy describe what happened at the group meeting?
9. What is Harding’s reaction?
10. Define “matriarchy.”
11. 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.
12. List the punishments in order of severity that await any patient who refuses to answer Nurse Ratched’s questions.
13. “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 with the head of wires.” Why do you think the punishment for disrupting the routine of the ward is described using Christ-like images?
14. Speculate on what the author may be implying about McMurphy’s fate if he continues to disrupt Nurse Ratched’s ward.
15. State a theme for this novel based on the following passage form 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 laug any more, and he loses one of the biggest edges he’s got on his side.”

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

**CHAPTER 6: 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.”
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?

**CHAPTER 7: 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?”*

1. One of the overall themes o 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.

**CHAPTER 8: 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 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”?
4. Find a passage in this section, other than the one describing his shorts, that compares McMurphy to the freedom available in nature.

**CHAPTER 9: 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?

**CHAPTER 10: THERE’S A MONOPOLY GAME…**

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

**CHAPTER 11: 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?

**CHAPTER 12: 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.

**CHAPTER 13: 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 Bibbit.
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.