

English 11 - Summer Reading Guide

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest by Ken Kesey

Ken Kesey wrote this novel after he spent time working in a psychiatric ward during a night shift. He based many of his characters off of real patients he encountered while working, and he also voluntarily received an electroshock treatment to further his research for the novel. Kesey was part of a countercultural movement in the late 50's and early 60's, and wrote this novel as an attack on government control and conformity. Consider this background information as you begin reading the novel. Enjoy and consider the following as you read.

1. Consider the sexual repression in the novel as a form of control. Why is the attempt to remove sexuality from the Ward important to Ratched, and what is the effect on the subjects?
2. Consider how Bromden's delusions about the Combine and Nurse Ratched's "wires" are appropriate metaphors for the atmosphere of the Ward.
3. In this novel Kesey is making a statement about the negative impact of excessive government control. Consider similarities between the Ward and other governments. Look up the term "totalitarianism" if you do not know it already.
4. Consider the effect that the "log book" had in keeping the patients from organizing against Nurse Ratched.
5. Consider why Kesey chose the title of the novel. How does the children's song from which he derived the title apply to the novel?
6. How is the fishing trip important to the patients?
7. Why does Bromden choose to stay in the fog at times, and why is it significant that he notices McMurphy trying to pull him out of the fog?
8. Consider what happens to McMurphy in the end. What does this say about Kesey's thoughts about controlling governments or companies?