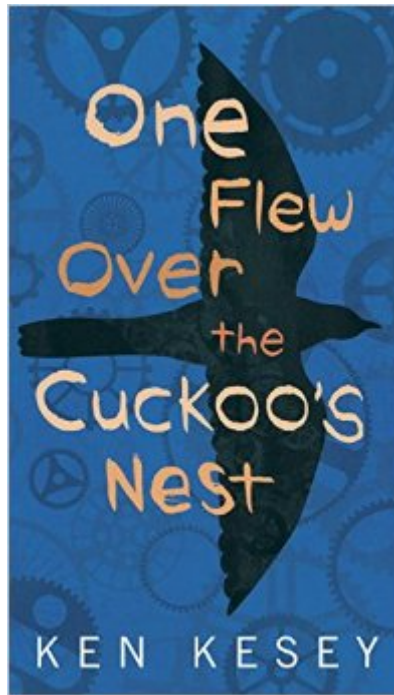


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# One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest



## Synopsis

An international bestseller and the basis for the hugely successful film, Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is one of the defining works of the 1960s. In this classic novel, Ken Kesey's hero is Randle Patrick McMurphy, a boisterous, brawling, fun-loving rebel who swaggers into the world of a mental hospital and takes over. A lusty, life-affirming fighter, McMurphy rallies the other patients around him by challenging the dictatorship of Nurse Ratched. He promotes gambling in the ward, smuggles in wine and women, and openly defies the rules at every turn. But this defiance, which starts as a sport, soon develops into a grim struggle, an all-out war between two relentless opponents: Nurse Ratched, backed by the full power of authority, and McMurphy, who has only his own indomitable will. What happens when Nurse Ratched uses her ultimate weapon against McMurphy provides the story's shocking climax. • "BRILLIANT!" • "Time • "A SMASHING ACHIEVEMENT...A TRULY ORIGINAL NOVEL!" • "Mark Schorer • "Mr. Kesey has created a world that is convincing, alive and glowing within its own boundaries...His is a large, robust talent, and he has written a large, robust book." • "Saturday Review

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This novel officially ends the 4-book reading that I had set forth to get my teeth into this summer. I must say, that it truly stands out from anything I had read before it, be it this summer or anytime for that matter. Ken Kesey weaves a tale that is smart, witty, sometimes insane and ultimately tragic. Though the setting is mainly in a mental asylum somewhere in Oregon, this story has a universal appeal to it that can be felt by anyone, anywhere in this world. R.P. McMurphy is a sane man that,

due to a brush with the law, opts for being committed in a mental asylum rather than be incarcerated with hard labor. Upon his entry in the secluded world of the asylum, he strips all the barriers formed and starts laying his own rules, in his own way. This leads to problems with the head honcho of the place. A big, gruesome, and menacingly evil Nurse Ratched, dubbed Big Nurse for her huge frame and even huger bosom. The rollercoaster, that patient McMurphy takes the inmates through, finally leads them to realize the ultimate goal. That man, no matter the situation, can always hold his destiny in his hands. This knowledge, achieved in the end, does not come without a price. Set in the late 60s, early 70s, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is a gem of modern literary works that came out at the time. It brought out a wonderfully-made movie, starring Jack Nicholson as McMurphy. The role defined him as an actor to be reckoned with. Though the movie is seen through the eyes of McMurphy, the novel's perspective looks at things through the eyes of a big half white, half Native American inmate, that acts deaf and dumb in front of the asylum's staff. The narrative, because it is through the eyes of a mental patient, can at times be truly insane. That's where the fun really lies. Kesey works his magic in making us feel the insanity and despair of the patients. He can be funny, in a laugh out loud kind of fashion. He can also be tragic, when you realize what the inmates go through each passing day. The novel is a definitive treatment of the age old abode of individual versus establishment. This is a very human story, with a lot of suffering and exploration of man's insecurities. It has become a classic that some schools have even recommended as part of their curriculum. Through all the ups and downs of the story, I was, forever inspired and ultimately liberated in mind to finally realize that you can take away a man's life, but never his freedom. The book receives my highest recommendation.

This is a great book and I'm sure you can read the other reviews for insight into why it is so great, but the Kindle edition isn't very good. It's like they ran the book through a cheap OCR and just threw it at . There are lots of scanning errors. 'He' often comes thorough as 'I le' and the letter 'c' and 'e' appear to be interchangeable in multiple places. Avoid the Kindle edition.

Counterculture icon and author Ken Kesey (1935-2001) wrote his first novel, "*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*," in 1960. The book was a response to the author's experiences testing mind-altering drugs for the federal government and his later tenure as a nurse's aide in the same facility. In the introduction to the novel, Robert Faggen places this seminal novel in its proper context, arguing that this book incorporates several themes of the 1950's: the Cold War, the plight of the Native Americans, the reliance on psychiatry as a cure all for social problems, and the vestigial remnants of

McCarthyism. Even if you could care less about how Kesey's book fits into American cultural history, you could hardly fail to miss the overarching theme of his novel: the tensions between the individual and the state, between those trapped in an industrial society and those who wish to live in freedom. There is a film version of this book starring Jack Nicholson and Louise Fletcher that adequately captures Kesey's stark visions. The author's tale takes place in a mental asylum at an unknown time. Perhaps this is because time has little importance to the inmates in the facility. The people in this particular ward of the hospital fall into categories of 'acute' or 'chronic,' depending on whether they have hope of recovery or are irrevocably ill. The days are full of drudgery, an endless round of medications interspersed with playing cards against the background of canned polka music. Everyday the acute patients meet for group therapy that really doubles as a McCarthyesque tattling session. The name of the game is acquiescence to the myriad rules and regulations of the institution. Those inmates who violate the rules earn a trip to the disturbed ward or a quick trip to the electroshock chamber. Repeated disobedience could lead to a lobotomy. Predictably, fear is the perpetual state in which most of the patients live. But with the appearance of a nonconformist named Randle McMurphy, fear starts to give way to a burgeoning hope that life will become better in this hospital. The narrator of this story is Chief Bromden, a mixed blood Indian who is a patient in the ward. This man spends his days mopping and sweeping the floors while hearing and seeing everything that goes on around him. The Chief fears that something called the 'Combine' controls the world. For him, the 'Combine' is the machinery that fills the walls and floors of the hospital, constantly spying on and controlling the men in the ward. He believes that those who work in the asylum are actually full of cogs and gears, are part of this giant, controlling machine. Moreover, the staff and the patients believe that Bromden is a deaf mute. He isn't, but Kesey's choice of this Indian as the narrator of unfolding events is a stroke of brilliance. Since no one thinks the Chief can hear or speak, he becomes privy to every activity in the institution. The staff speaks freely around him because they feel they have nothing to worry about. His cleaning duties allow him full access to every area of the floor, including the room where the staff meets to discuss other inmates. You cannot help but like Bromden, and you quickly question whether his observations are truly the ramblings of a madman. The central figure in Bromden's 'Combine' theory is Nurse Ratched, sometimes referred to as 'Big Nurse.' This seemingly grandmotherly woman personifies the Chief's fear of control and cold aloofness. Ratched runs the floor from her little glass booth, her hands on the levers of the machinery that controls the lights, the music, the group therapy sessions, and even most of the doctors. Her voice alone controls the destiny of the inmates. Ratched enforces the rules and regulations, and she decides who receives punishment or release. Big Nurse encourages stool

pigeons and belittles the patients with implied threats and stony glares, often masked under an ersatz exterior of patience and cheerfulness. With the arrival of McMurphy, Ratched prepares for a battle of wills that by extension is a war between the individual and the state. Randle McMurphy is a boisterous, tattooed, redheaded troublemaker ducking a sentence on a work farm by acting crazy. Right from the start, McMurphy undermines the rules and regulations of the hospital. He gambles for money, wanders the hall wearing nothing but towels, sings, and challenges Ratched's authority by going to the floor doctor to receive rule waivers. But far, far worse is McMurphy's effect on the other inmates in the institution. His breezy spirit and tenaciousness encourages others to demand changes in the daily routine. Randle is a subversive of the worst type, and Ratched will do anything in her power to slap down this upstart to her fascistic rule. The end of the story seems to mark a significant defeat for the concept of individualism, but if one reads closely it is apparent Kesey keeps the dream of freedom alive however ephemeral it may be. Although I disagree strongly with Kesey's career as a counterculture mainstay, I loved this book. Everything about it is brilliant, from the characterization to the tight writing style. The Penguin edition even includes pencil sketches of people Kesey drew during his work as a nurse's aide. These haunting sketches add a special dimension to the text. Ultimately, the novel works because of its messages of freedom versus entrapment and the dangers of both conformity and nonconformity to the human soul. I recommend you run, not walk, to get this book.

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