

## One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

### Major Characters

Randle Patrick McMurphy ('Mac')	Jack Nicholson
A rebellious prisoner who is sent to a mental hospital in order to be "evaluated for mental illness."	
Nurse Mildred Ratched	Louise Fletcher
A cold and strict nurse who is responsible for the patients at the hospital.	
Dr. John Spivey	Dean R. Brooks
The head of the hospital, who tries to find out if McMurphy is truly sick, at least by the standards of modern psychology.	
Chief	Will Sampson
An American Indian patient who everyone thinks is deaf and mute.	
Billy Bibbit	Brad Dourif
A young, gentle patient who has a bad stuttering problem. ("To stutter" is to speak with an uncontrolled repeating of sounds.)	
Harding	William Redfield
A highly educated patient who is terribly depressed about the relationship he has with his wife.	
Martini	Danny Devito
A patient who is apparently mentally retarded, but kind and gentle.	
Charlie Cheswick	Sydney Lassick
A patient who often acts like a young child.	
Washington	Nathan George
A worker at the hospital who is responsible for security.	
Candy	Marya Small
A girlfriend of McMurphy's who lives near the hospital.	
Rose	Lorisa Mortiz
A friend of Candy.	
Turkle	Scatman Crothers
A night time worker at the hospital who is supposed to make sure that no one gets into trouble when the rest of the staff is away.	

### Plot Summary

This film is the story of Randle Patrick McMurphy, a man who has been sentenced to prison for having sex with a 15-year-old girl. McMurphy is a rebellious but almost comical person, who, in the summer of 1963, at the age of 38, ends up in an Oregon state mental hospital because he refuses to work while in prison. It is not clear if McMurphy intentionally tried to convince prison officials that he is crazy, but regardless, he soon finds himself in a place filled with men who most of society would consider insane or mentally ill. Even more challenging for McMurphy is the fact that the hospital is run by Nurse Ratched, who is determined to maintain absolute control over the hospital and its patients.

Soon after his arrival, an increasingly tense battle grows between them. McMurphy is determined to challenge the daily routine of these men's generally sad and boring lives, but Nurse Ratched is equally determined to keep the institution as peaceful and predictable as it had been before. Yet over the course of several months, McMurphy begins to win over the hearts of the various patients, and in their bitter struggle over such things as the right to watch baseball on TV, it soon becomes clear that the hospital and its emotionally repressive ways might be as insane as McMurphy, or any of his supposedly crazy friends.

A Background Note: "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" is based on Ken Kesey's critically acclaimed 1962 novel of the same name. The movie is considered by some critics to be one of the greatest films ever made, and in fact, it was only the second film in history to win all five of the most important Academy Awards---Best Movie, Best Director, Best Actor (Nicholson), Best Actress (Fletcher), and Best Screenplay.

## ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST, Ken Kesey 1962, movie 1975

2 hrs 11 minutes, 33 segments

### Preteaching

Kesey won a scholarship and attended Stanford University as a graduate student in their Creative Writing program. He was a part-time orderly in a Palo Alto veteran's hospital, working with psychiatric patients, and this helped inspire the novel. It is set in an authentic mental hospital, Oregon State Hospital in Salem, Oregon. The book was published in 1962. It was first a Broadway play in 1963. Milos Forman directed the movie in 1975. One of three films to win all five major Oscar categories. The American Film Institute called it one of the 20 best American movies. Define cuckoo, cuckoo's nest (a new idiom), cuckoo clock. Heavy on profanity because...

Segment	Minutes	Hours	Summary
1	0:00	0:00	Credits; car driving along the road, Ratched arrives, the routine
2	4:23	4:23	Mac arrives, meets Chief, sees card game
3	8:44	8:44	Mac and the doctor
4	14:10	14:10	Mac's first meeting, "peculiar"
5	21:21	21:21	In the yard, bus for non-restricted patient outings, trying to teach Chief basketball
6	25:16	25:16	Cards with Mac
7	27:37	27:37	Tired of the noise, Mac goes to nurse's station, medication time, the bet that he can break her for \$1 with Tabor
8	31:36	31:36	Meeting, 3 votes for watching World Series
9	34:25	34:25	Monopoly, hose-down, "But I tried, didn't I? At least I did that."
10	39:27	39:27	Meeting, Billy proposed to Celia, suicide, vote #2
11	47:32	47:32	Imaginary game
12	49:04	49:04	Doctor tells Mac he's sane, shit on the floor
13	51:40	51:40	Over the fence, Chief smiles, steal the bus, get Candy
14	55:12	55:12	Arrival at the marina, borrowing the boat. Intros at 56:35
15	62:20	1:02:20	On the boat, sneak off with Candy, they come back with big fish
16	65:40	1:05:40	Doctors' meeting, not crazy but dangerous, Ratched says "I think we can help him."
17	67:07	1:07:07	Basketball

Handout after this part

### Week Two - Before the movie

Skip to segment 14, 56:35 for intros on the boat. Cheswick, Taber, Frederickson, Scanlon, Mr Harding, Bibbitt, Martini, Sefelt, McMurphy. Sane or insane? Then, ask about Nurse Ratched and Chief. Can he hear? Can he talk?

18	69:39	1:09:39	In the bath, Mac learns he can't leave until Ratched says so <b><i>Pause to explain the jail situation, the assault and rape, we don't know if he faked because we never saw him in jail, time, etc</i></b>
19	70:57	1:10:57	Meeting, Mac challenges the guys for not telling him and learns they're mostly voluntary (Bromden is Chief) <b><i>pause to explain what voluntary is and who is/isn't where convenient</i></b> Cheswick snaps, big fight
20	79:30	1:19:30	Chief talks, Mac electroshocked - <b><i>Pause to explain - It's not a punishment - It was believed to have a calming affect on psychotic patients. It was common in the 60s but is rare now.</i></b>
21	87:01	1:27:01	Sefelt's being accused of giving his medications to Fredrickson when Mac fakes being a zombie
22	89:44	1:29:44	Ratched leaves for the night and Mac calls the girls
23	97:00	1:37:00	"Medication time"
24	98:00	1:38:00	Turkel sees the party and freaks out
25	101:31	1:41:31	Xmas party, Mac gets the keys, goodbyes begin
26	105:00	1:45:00	Billy's goodbye turns into a delay as they wait for Billy and Cathy
27	110:49	1:50:49	Next morning, Mac wakes up by the window as the day shift surveys the damage
28	113:30	1:53:30	"Billy's missing," Ratched will tell his mother
29	119:11	1:59:11	Billy is waiting in the doctor's office as the others are being rounded up. Mac uses the keys, a bit of fighting, a chance to flee through the open when Pillbo screams, Mac has to see what happens, he chokes Ratched, Washington nails him

30	122:18	2:02:18	Rumors of Mac's escape leave Chief wondering
31	124:22	2:04:22	Mac returns at night, Chief kills him - <b><i>Pause to explain frontal lobotomy. Remove the part of the brain that causes violent tendencies in people who can't be cured any other way. It also removes free will and personality.</i></b>
32	129:13	2:09:13	Chief breaks out
33	131:35	2:11:35	Credits

### Post-Teaching

The role of Nurse Ratched was turned down by five actresses before Louise Fletcher took it one week before filming. The actor who played McMurphy, Jack Nicholson, was their second choice. The film is different from the book, and at one point Kesey almost sued them over it. And nobody thought it would make money, but in its time it was the seventh-highest grossing film ever, making almost \$300 million worldwide.

Is there anything you want to ask me about this movie? What does this movie mean? That's what you want me to tell you, isn't it? According to the author of the book, it's how America beats down anyone who is different and makes everyone the same. According to the screenwriters, it's about problems in mental institutions. What is sane? What is crazy? And if you decide someone is crazy, what is the best way to treat him? According to the director, it's about life in his home country, Czechoslovakia. I bet you could ask the actors, the actresses, the producers, the people who have turned it into plays, and get different answers. There are university courses that analyze it, websites that analyze it. When I watch this movie, I think that we've all had experiences where we weren't in control of our own lives, where someone else told us what to do. I think that's what it means. But really, what does it mean? Whatever you think it means.

### Discussion Questions:

1. Was McMurphy admirable? Dangerous? Both?
2. What are the goals of a mental hospital?
3. Was Nurse Ratched's version of "therapy" helping the group before Mac arrived?
4. How would you have reacted to Mac if you had been a voluntary patient at the hospital when he showed up?
5. Was the hospital's solution to the "McMurphy problem" justified? Would that happen today? In your country?
6. In the Ken Kesey novel, the story is not told from the point of view of Mac, but from another one of the characters. Can you guess which one?
7. How many times did you see Nurse Ratched smile? Lose her temper?
8. Who do you think helped the patients more, Ratched or McMurphy?
9. Do you think Ratched believed that she was helping the patients, or do you think she was only interested in controlling them? Or do you think she believed controlling them was the best way to help them? She said at the end of one meeting that they should keep McMurphy because "I think we can help him." Did she believe this?
10. What was the purpose of the meetings? Were they helpful or harmful?
11. Did Nurse Ratched kill Billy Bibbit? Did she mean to? What did she do that she perhaps shouldn't have done regarding causing or allowing it to happen?
12. Do you think that they gave electroshock therapy to Cheswick because they thought it would help him? Chief? McMurphy? If not, why did they use electroshock therapy?
13. Do you think they gave McMurphy a frontal lobotomy because they believed he was insane and this was the only way to cure him? If not, why did they do it?
14. Why did Chief kill McMurphy? If you were McMurphy, would you want Chief to kill you?